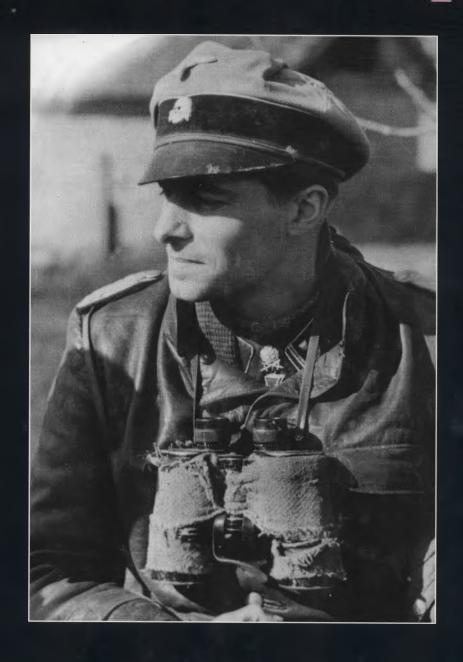
# Jochen Peiper



COMMANDER PANZERREGIMENT LEIBSTANDARTE

PATRICK AGTE

#### JOCHEN PEIPER: COMMANDER PANZERREGIMENT LEIBSTANDARTE

is the life story of one of the most famous soldiers of WWII. An excellent soldier and tactician, Peiper always led from the front and by example. He was revered by his men, and the exploits of his armored infantry battalion of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" are legendary. After the Battle of Kursk, he became the commander of the Panzerregiment. He and his units fought at all the hot spots of the European theatre: Russia (1941, Karkov, Kursk, Korsun Pocket), Normandy, Battle of the Bulge, Hungary 1945 and the last battles in Austria. Unjustly sentenced to death for the Malmedy incident, he spent many years in prison. After being released, he was always hounded by the Malmedy specter. After moving to Traves, France, his home was attacked at night and set on fire by suspected French Communists. Jochen Peiper died inside his house when it collapsed as he tried to save his documents.

This book documents the life of Jochen Peiper with more than 600 pages, including more than 850 photos and 30 pages of documents. It is also an excellent record of the history of the premier division of the Waffen-SS, the "LSSAH", and the personal careers of many Waffen-SS soldiers and recipients of Germany's higher combat awards. The majority of the photos are either new or rare and have been reproduced on 70 lb. glossy acid-free paper. If you are a historian, collector, military researcher, modeler or wargamer, or just enjoy reading about small unit armor actions, then this book is for you.

We hope that you enjoy it for many years to come.

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## Jochen Peiper

### COMMANDER PANZERREGIMENT LEIBSTANDARTE

by PATRICK AGTE

Translated by Robert E. Dohrenwend

J.J. FEDOROWICZ PUBLISHING INC.

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#### **COMMANDER PANZERREGIMENT LEIBSTANDARTE**

#### by PATRICK AGTE

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John Fedorowicz, Michael Olive and Robert Edwards

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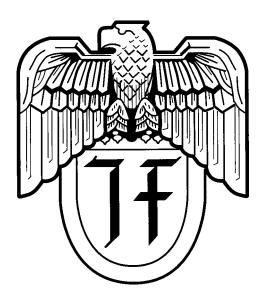
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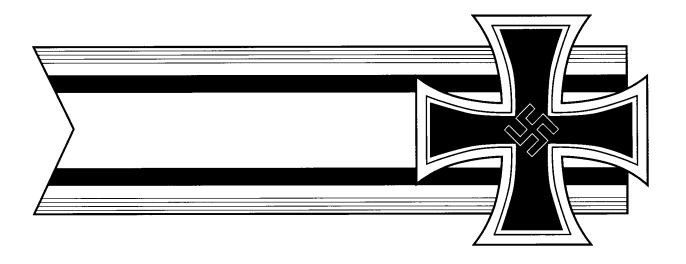
PANZER ACES 2

STURMGESCHÜTZE FORWARD!

A PILOT'S PILOT - KARL BAUR



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On 11 January 1945 Jochen Peiper was awarded the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Iron Cross.

#### **Author's Foreword**

The biography of Jochen Peiper which you have before you — the second of a highly distinguished officer of the Waffen-SS by this author — is an attempt to portray one of the best known and most highly decorated Panzer officers whose rapid rise in his military career is inseparably connected to his tragic personal fate.

At the age of twenty eight, Jochen Peiper was promoted to the command of the Panzer Regiment of the "Leibstandarte", one of the best known Panzer divisions within the German Wehrmacht. He was decorated for his deeds with the Oak Leaves and Swords to the Knight's Cross.

At the age of thirty he was an SS-Standartenführer, the equivalent of a Colonel. His reputation became legendary within the units he led, but also spread far beyond their limits, and his men worshipped him. After the war the American conquering power branded him a war criminal in a show trial, using "confessions" obtained by refined torture from his fellow prisoners as evidence, and he was sentenced to death. Peiper began a new life in 1956 after eleven and a half years in prison and made numerous attempts to ensure his family had a secure economic existence. When these were frustrated by agitation incited by different groups, Peiper reluctantly turned his back on Germany and moved to France. He was murdered in 1976 after a persecution campaign by the French Communists.

Analytical evaluations of the available primary sources, materials such as personal papers, official war diaries, private notes, letters and information gained from numerous interviews with contemporary witnesses, has allowed the author to construct a biography of Peiper on a scientific basis. Every phase of his life was critically investigated, new material was obtained and a number of previously accepted clichés had to be rejected as false.

The reader will be able to follow Peiper's youth and watch him enter the SS and the Leibstandarte. He will see him as a company commander during the French campaign in 1940 and in the east in 1941. In 1943, he will follow Peiper back to Russia as the commander of the armored infantry battalion of the "Leibstandarte" and will watch him as commander of the Panzer Regiment of that same division on the Eastern Front and during the Normandy invasion during the summer of 1944. During the winter of 1944 the reader will witness the Ardennes Offensive and in the spring of 1945 he will watch the fighting in Hungary and Austria. With Peiper, he will walk the bitter path to Dachau, where Peiper was sentenced to death, and he will see him in Landsberg Prison. Finally, the reader will follow Peiper through the years after his release to his death.

The histories of the Leibstandarte's armored infantry battalion and its Panzer regiment are woven into this biography of Peiper, as these were the units which Peiper commanded, not only one after the other, but mostly together. The photographic material, most of which has not been previously published, and the exact listings of officer and staff positions within these units complements and adds precision to the contents of this work. All those who received the highest decorations, the Knight's Cross, the German Cross in Gold, the Close Combat Badge in Gold, and the Honor Roll Clasp in Peiper's Panzergruppe, have been mentioned in detail and are shown in the pictures.

In this way, we offer the reading public the life history of an officer who was surely one of the most remarkable and interesting figures in recent German military history. His tragic fate reflects the systematic consequences of the baseless attitudes toward him and millions of his fellow veterans, not just those of the Waffen-SS but of the entire German Wehrmacht, attitudes

which have survived right up to today, and against which today's government offers no protection. Every other country in the world stands behind the soldiers who protect it, honors them and the sacrifices they made for their country.

During a period when an exhibition sponsored by a criminal and conclusively proven communist – in collaboration with a big capitalist – can travel through Germany and Austria and attempt to indict the German Wehrmacht with fighting a criminal war and, as a consequence, seek to slander and criminalize the millions of its dead and victims – without the German government or the Bundeswehr making the slightest effort to protect them – this book can only be dedicated to the memory of every German soldier who lost his life doing his duty for his homeland and the survival of his family.

The author would like to thank all those who helped him with this work. Among many others, I owe special thanks to: Hinrich Peiper, Otto Baum, Kuno Balz, Otto Dinse, Dr. Arndt Fischer, Werner Grothmann, Paul Guhl, Erhard Gührs, Dr. Hans Hennecke, Karl Hollander, Werner Kindler, Edmund Martin, Dr. Helmut Pönisch, Heinz Meier, Paul Albert Kausch, Dr. Bernhard Frank, Rolf Reiser, Rudolf von Ribbentrop, Gerhard Stiller, Erich Straßgschwandtner, Neil Thomson and Günther Wagner.

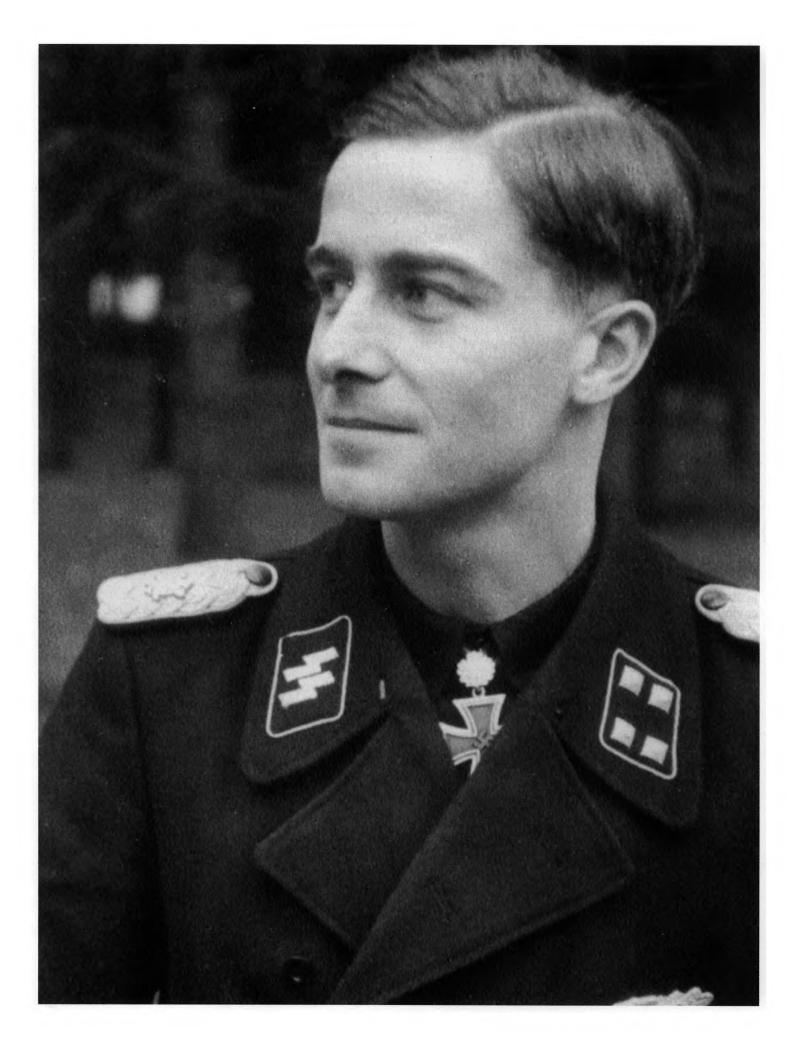
#### Addendum for the English Edition

For the English-reading public, especially for those from the United States, the name Jochen Peiper is well known as a result of the Ardennes Offensive. His name is frequently used in conjunction with the German offensive in the Ardennes in December 1944. It is in this connection that authors, especially American authors, never tire in their assertion that the Panzer group led by the then 29-year-old Obersturmbannführer of the Waffen-SS killed American prisoners of war at the crossroads at Baugnez in the vicinity of Malmedy on 17 December 1944 in a premeditated fashion.

Because this claim is also used again and again by certain circles in Germany as an accusation against that Kampfgruppe of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division and, going beyond that, as an accusation against the entire Waffen-SS, I have intensively investigated Panzergruppe Peiper and its commander during its operations during the Ardennes Offensive within the framework of this book. In addition to evaluating the after-action reports from both sides during the battle, I have intensively interviewed all those who are still living who could be reached. Further, I have studied all of the files relating to the Malmedy Process as conducted by the "victor's justice" of the Americans. I will show the reader the shocking interrogation methods used by the Americans to extort their "confessions" from the defendants and saddle them with those and other fabricated accusations.

In a show trial conducted by the Americans, Jochen Peiper and many of his comrades were sentenced to death in a process which contravened all norms of internationally recognized jurisprudence.

Through this book, the reader will become acquainted with Jochen Peiper as a person and as an officer. He will see that Jochen Peiper served his country as a German soldier in a hard war with great courage and with selfless loyalty. After his release from 11 years of imprisonment, Jochen Peiper lived in France where he was attacked by communist criminals and cowardly murdered. Thus one of the best soldiers of Germany and the winner of its highest decorations for bravery met a tragic, undeserved end.



#### **Preface**

It is my desire that this carefully researched biography of the life and times of Jochen Peiper be given particular attention by historians and those interested in the truth, as an account of those periods in German history before, during, and after the war and as documentation of the generation which lived through those periods. It is equally my hope that this book will force German historical writing to more correctly evaluate German youth during the Third Reich. Peiper's life and fate, his accomplishments and his thorny road after the war, are (compressed and condensed) the fate of the youth of that period, who are still mocked today. They were eager, as is the right of every people, to earn an honorable place for their country and people among the family of nations, in order to correct the constricting and oppressive treaties resulting from the First World War.

Jochen Peiper volunteered for the SS while a school boy. Soon after the outbreak of the war, his charismatic leadership and his military gifts were given the attention they deserved. He advanced from company commander to battalion commander and, at the age of 28, became the regimental commander of a Panzer regiment. His leadership was daring; he remained, however, human and likable. He received the highest decorations for bravery. For him, the war was never a means or reason to strive for honor and recognition. He was a living example of chivalry and bravery, and possessed a natural charm to which no one was immune. He was well aware that military duties could mean horrible spiritual and physical mutilation for him and for the soldiers entrusted to him.

At no time did Jochen Peiper ever fall prey to official propaganda. By the fall of 1943 he had already expressed the opinion to his officers, who were very close to him, that this war could no longer be won by Germany. We on the Eastern Front knew that we had to hold off the enemy so that the entire eastern army and the civilian population of eastern Germany wouldn't fall

into the hands of the Russian enemy. We knew about the exhortation to the Red Army to regard German women as war booty.

Jochen Peiper was at the front right up to the last battle. When the war was over the victorious powers sought him. He was pronounced guilty of having ordered prisoners shot. Sentenced to death by hanging, he waited years in a red jacket for his execution, only to be given his freedom again after a long period of imprisonment. But the taint attached to the higher officers of the Waffen-SS made it impossible for him to begin a new career in a changed Germany. Any promising beginning was destroyed by new persecution, and new accusations were initiated against him and his battalion in 1964 for war crimes in Italy. Only after four years of thorough investigation were all accusations against him and his soldiers dropped as baseless. Although Jochen Peiper wasn't guilty, he was still persecuted. He tried to make a new home in Traves in France, where I visited him. He lived there happily for a while, until the life of this upright, straightforward and exemplary man was extinguished during the night of 14 July 1976 by a group of murderers. There will always be intellectual arsonists in this world, and they will always turn against the best.

It gives me a good feeling when I, one of his subordinate officers, can contribute to the remembrance of this brave man, who never wanted to be a superman, but who truly was an exceptional human being. May the human virtues he embodied once more become a model for all men, and not just in Germany.

Erhard Gührs

Former SS-Obersturmführer and company commander in the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 2 of the Leibstandarte, commanded by Jochen Peiper. May 1998.



The Commander, Jochen Peiper, showing signs of strain during Operation Citadel in the hot month of July 1943.

#### Introduction

On a dark and gloomy Fall day in 1952 in Bavaria, or more precisely in Landsberg on the Lech, at the huge building complex on Hindenburg Ring 12, which housed War Criminal Prison No. 1 of the American Occupation Forces, Joachim Peiper, a German officer condemned to life imprisonment, sat in his cell, writing:

A war criminal sits on his folding bed in monastic solitude and day dreams. On the door it says "Life Imprisonment" and on the calendar "October 1952". The stove sings, the spider looks for a new place to spend the winter, and autumn places its rough hand on the Swedish curtains. Thirteen years of separation from wife and family, five birthdays spent as a man condemned to death, and now this eighth Christmas in the penitentiary. A really great way to spend your youth. No animal should be this badly treated. Man is capable of great sacrifice and great vileness. Oh, how endlessly long must the chain of experience be before we even begin to sort it all out. The wartime generation has learned about others. And in Landsberg there is even more time to examine this knowledge and to try to make sense of it.

When we entered the world of barbed wire for the first time seven and a half years ago, we were like children who had lost their mother during the night. Growing up and maturing under the simple rules of the front lines, we found ourselves unable to grasp the new rules of the game. Whoever initially said that a policy blinded by anger would have its eyes opened by the truth, soon had to admit that you can expect very little justice when a blood soaked figure needed to be painted on the wall for demagogic purposes. However, our good conscience was limitless and so was our ignorance. The state had only taught its youth how to use weapons.

We had never practiced how to behave in the face of betrayal. Yesterday, we were still a part of the Wehrmacht; today, we are shunned and outlawed, whipping boys surrounded by a howling mob. We, who so far had only known a part of the impulse for self preservation – courageous trembling in the face of danger – now had to get used to shouts of "Stop, thief!" and to denunciations by those sorry figures who wished to rise by stooping low. Who could have kept from having doubts about Germany? Whose mouths weren't shut in disgust?

As our living space gradually constricted, from camp to barracks to cell, we became blind to what bound us together and could see clearly that which separated us. Distrust and spiritual nihilism took the place of comradeship. Everyone pointed out the failure of someone else and used accusation as an excuse for his own behavior. "Homo vulgaris" had freed himself from his chains. Primitive instinct celebrated its liberation from all restraint and we ourselves trampled about on others with selfdestructive joy. Hunger swung its whip and human dignity cringed. Honorable tradition and proud class consciousness bowed to the ground for a cigarette butt. Was it any wonder that the vengeful enemy assault found many weak positions amongst us? Discord and distrust are poor advisors in the court room. Regardless, the mission could not have been accomplished. Those who had ensnared us had put too much work into their preparations. Knowing this, we entered the arena and stood silent for three long months in the pillory. For three times thirty days we were dragged through the gutter behind the victor's chariots. Then it was finally over — A final wave of venom seized its prey and swept it through the dismal prison gates. Flotsam from the Second World War!

The meaning of freedom is first learned by losing it. What a priceless gift this seems to those imprisoned. Only someone who has lost his freedom can dare to estimate how long a day can be and what it can mean when the nightmare of concern and uncertainty descends upon our next-of-kin for four years and seven months. Each of us was granted 23 cubic meters of breathing space. From then on, our entire being stood on tiptoe in our cells.

Slowly things quieted down around us, except for the eternal rumble of our bellies and the song of life proclaimed by the blackbirds mornings and evenings. Oh you blackbirds! Is there any prisoner to whom you haven't given new hope?

Nerves – raw from the prosecutor's lash – welcomed isolation. Our fists opened slowly and savage protest against fate faded. Only the lack of understanding remained – anguish for our loved ones and our quarrels with Providence, which had cheated us disgracefully of an honorable bullet. We learned how to sit in the twilight ...

The further we sank, the more the present faded, the nearer we came to our roots and, the more the past could be seen in a stronger light. The old battlefields became fields of renunciation and our fallen comrades the example and guardians of our conduct.

The hard lesson began to dawn that life gave nothing without reason, that all of life's fortunes generally come with a price. Even the youngest among us never shirked in the face of the enemy.

We sat in Germany's darkest corner and looked back at our sun-soaked flight of Icarus. No one should cast down his eyes. What did our inadequacies and mistakes count against our ardent hearts which we were ready to bring to bear anytime and anywhere? Supermen, men, and those less than men had crossed our path and it turned out that these categories were always fluid. The more we progressed and moved away from the clichés, the clearer it seemed that life, like light, consisted of complementary colors. Nothing was painted in black and white, but in shades of gray. Very slowly, things grew brighter again.

We were young and challenges were inevitable. But who dies willingly on the gallows? We called out to Germany, and heard not an echo. We played chess through the walls, learned sign language and – in an emotional manner –wrote our obituaries.

Then we became tired and indifferent and gave up our eavesdropping along with our hopes. We became unfair and bitter.

Was there any decent guy who hadn't been jailed or any good-will that hadn't been trampled? No matter – many of us rejected the human race, became misanthropes, and dedicated our brain and glandular activity henceforth only to the production of rancor. There is that type of person who can be recognized anywhere by an inexhaustible memory which cultivates old resentments.

Others recognized that the pseudo-democratic motto, "Here we are all equal", was no more than stupid, empty words, a life preserver filled with lead and dragging you in the gutter. They fought with all their strength against the mass mentality and the continuous drag downwards. They became philosophers and attempted to preserve their internal freedom by conscious individualization and differentiation. They eventually sat in jail as if in an armchair. The most fortunate however, were those who knew how to make the best out of any situation and had the same outlook on life as a may-fly. Who hasn't run into these happy creatures whose native wit, even in the nastiest of situations, can't come up with an even nastier reply? We all began to lead withdrawn, introspective lives, put on masks, and bared our teeth. We all flapped our wings until they were sore and developed calluses which protected the elbows.

When your life runs on behind stone walls, separate from wife and children, it is hard to remain just and objective. Young men pulled in powerless anger at their chains, felt their strength weaken and their courage tire. The leveling continued.

The time was so hard, that we forgot it quickly, like a bad dream. It brought indolence and torment with it, spilled over its banks, and could no longer be exorcised by magic scratchings on the wall. We began to tell time by shaving days and pudding days.

What got into our death-row cells from the outside wasn't calculated to make dying easier for us either. We discovered that we had belonged to a criminal organization and had served an unjust state. A slimy flood of investigative literature and memoirs produced explanations from diplomats and military men who had apparently worked for the defeat of their fatherland. We seemed to be a "Decius Mus" fallen into a cesspool. Henceforth, there was no possibility of charting our position in the gloomy cellars of our ghostly country. The only fixed point in this chaos was the quiet heroism of our wives and mothers.

But time not only separated, it also healed. Gradually and timidly, a national consciousness began to find a foothold outside. The fad for corpse looting was over. Order and long-suppressed, credible decency returned. And with these first skirmishers our comrades who had long held their tongues stepped back onto the scene. The pariahs of the post-war period had not forgotten their even less fortunate brothers. What did it matter that their readiness to help was inversely proportional to their previous rank? Germany's most loyal sons have usually come from small cottages. For us, however, it was as if a cut-off battle group had finally got air-dropped supplies, and, taking a deep breath, realized that it had not been written off. A Panzer radioman, blinded in the war, sat in some damp cellar apartment and wove a cushion cover for his condemned tank commander. A double amputee tore himself from his favorite book, and helping hands moved on distant continents. Shouldn't a weak spark of hope flare up again? A nonsensical period began to recover its meaning.

We had become so defiant and surly because of continuous beating, that the alienation process was almost irreversible. Suddenly we felt again the revitalizing breath of fresh air of the comradeship borne of the front lines and became aware that there were other values on the outside besides rewarding the vulgar and showing contempt for all values. We gained a new understanding of the difficulties of life outside the gates, and the belief that Landsberg was the center of the earth died.

We found the concept of tolerance through pressure and ferment, and it may be that the value of those lost years lies in that tolerance. We first had to push into the region of self-understanding, so difficult to reach, before we found our human shortcomings.

And there, in this hard way, we began to learn to envy ourselves. Then in our fight for the truth and the essence of things, we first became conscious of the relativity and the subjectivity of any point of view. After a hard learning period, a broader outlook emerged from narrow-mindedness, and we threw off our blinders.

While the former senselessness of our period of suffering changed almost unnoticed into significance and understanding, a great change also took place on the outside, and the enormous sacrifices of our people received noticeable justification. Where would the torn-apart west be today, without each of those dikes of German bodies that were so important to history and that can no longer be ignored? The line of occidental combat outposts runs in a wide circle from the Caucasus to Finland. Representatives of our entire culture kept watch silently. And although their grave mounds are leveled and many nations are still ashamed of their noblest sons, it is still only thanks to this avant-garde that Genghis Khan's heirs didn't ride their tanks all the way to the Atlantic.

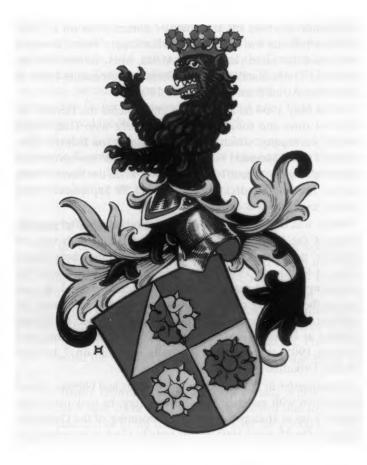
Let us bury our hatred for their sakes, comrades. History will be a fairer judge than contemporaries blind by anger. The danger is so menacing and the need so great, that no one can be allowed to fail to answer the call.

Never forget that the first European fell in the ranks of the Waffen-SS, that those killed after the war mostly came from our ranks. It only became open season on them because of their belief in the indivisible unity of western society. Consider the evidence of their blood. Don't take half measures. The idea of Europe is the only political ideal that is still worth fighting for today. Never was its realization closer. Strangle lies, punch slander in the nose, help your neighbor and the war widow. When everyone goes back to simple values, gives up egoism, makes a virtue of poverty, and once more feels himself responsible to all, then once more we will get the carts out of the mud; the dams will be ready when the storm tide comes.

During the war our proud divisions were considered a solid elite. According to captured documents, our steadiness made us a legend in every nation. Hopefully our children will be able to say the same of us, that in misfortune we too were not unequal to our fate, that we ourselves in the Diaspora provided the leaven for reconciliation and the European idea. I salute everyone who remained free in prison.

Impressive lines, written in the most hopeless and lonely year of his life, by a man condemned to death, and whose sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment.

This prose indicates an educated, intelligent man. How did this man arrive in a jail cell? Who was Jochen Peiper? Numerous legends and stubborn slander have piled up over the years around this officer and hidden, the truth about him. This book attempts to provide answers to these and other questions and to sketch the life of the officer and man, Joachim Peiper.



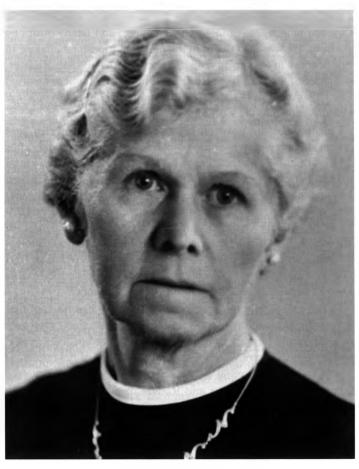
The Peiper family coat of arms.



Jochen Peiper's parents. Here: his father, Woldemar, as a Major in 1940.



Jochen Peiper's grandfather, the Royal Seminary Director (1841-1894).



His mother Charlotte.

#### The Peiper Family Origins

Joachim Peiper was born in Berlin-Wilmersdorf on 30 January 1915, the son of the Prussian Captain Woldemar Peiper and his wife Charlotte. The Peipers were not native Berliners but originated in Silesia, where they had resided for centuries. The following presents a brief overview of Jochen Peiper's ancestors in order to cast some light on the origin of the family. In order to keep this account to a reasonable length, we will only consider the direct male line here.

The Peipers first show up in 1550, when their first ancestor Hans Peipert appears, whose son Hans Peyper lived in Friedland as a farmer.

George Peiper came into the world around 1646 in Schmiedeberg and died as a hardware salesman in Bunzlau, where he and his wife Elizabeth (b. Hoferichter) had 11 children. His coat of arms bore three roses, with four heads indicating the branch of the family. One of his sons was George Gottlob Peiper, born in Bunzlau on 16 September 1689. He was a weaver and had numerous children there with his wife Katharina.

His son Samuel George, born in 1720, became a grand master weaver and owned several houses. In 1750 he married Anna Rosina Schätzel, the daughter of a master glove maker. Their son, Samuel Gottlob, was born in Bunzlau in 1760, attended the university at Halle from 1782 to 1784 and was a rector in Striegau in Silesia from 1793 to 1823. In 1795 in Gaebersdorf he married Henriette Hentschel from Sorau/Niederlausitz and died in Hirschberg in 1824. His son, born in Striegau in 1798, attended the university of Breslau, passed his examination in theology in 1822 and was promoted to Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1839. The deacon, who was awarded the Order of the Red Eagle, Fourth Class, in 1874, specialized in Oriental languages: Chinese and Japanese, and later Polish and Russian. He was also fluent in the major European languages. In his second marriage in 1831, he married Auguste Richter, daughter of a pastor from Rudelstadt in the Bolkenhain District. On 3 February 1841 their son, Gotthold Maximilian Woldemar Peiper, came into the world in Hirschberg.

He attended the universities at Breslau and in Berlin, and afterwards was active as a pastor first in Petersdorf and, after 1875, in Groß Peiskerau. From 1879 to 1884 he was the central office district school inspector for the region of Breslau. He then became the royal seminary director in Angersburg (East Prussia) and, after 1888, in Koschmin in the province of Posen. In 1890 he received the Order of the Red Eagle, Fourth Class. In Hirschberg in 1875 he married Clara Rudolph, a minor noble's daughter from Wettschütz. One of their sons, Woldemar Carl Gustav Adolf, born on 18 July 1878, in Groß Peiskerau (Ohlau District in Silesia) was the father of Joachim Peiper.

In Peiper's family tree, as sketched above, it can be seen that across the generations there were mostly teachers and ministers of God on the father's line and land owners and officers on the mother's side. There were artisans on both sides of the family.

Woldemar Peiper grew up with his parents, at first in Breslau where his siblings Georg and Renate came into the world in 1880 and 1882. Renate died in her first year while the oldest brother, Wolfgang, died at the age of 22 in 1899 of consumption.<sup>2</sup> At 16 years of age, the junior Woldemar lost his father, who died in 1894 in Koschmin. His pupils had a headstone erected to the memory of their beloved teacher.<sup>3</sup> After his school

years, Woldemar and his brother Georg became soldiers and Woldemar received his lieutenant's commission on 22 May 1900. In 1904 he was in Lower Silesian Supply Trains Battalion No. 5, and that same year went to Africa, where he was with the (Rations) Trains Batallion of the German Protectorate Force in Southwest Africa from May 1905 to 1906.

On 24 May 1904 he and his unit encountered the Hereros for the first time and fought at the Waterberg with Hauptmann Franke's company, which belonged to Major von Estorff's Battalion of the 1. Mounted Field Regiment. Peiper was involved in more fighting on 15 and 16 August 1904 when the Hereros were pushed into the Sandfeld, and on 9 and 28 September, when enemy resistance was completely broken.

Peiper was transferred to the south with his unit after the outbreak of the Hottentot uprising. He was riding with von der Marwitz' patrol on 22 November 1904 when it took heavy casualties at Rietmont. Peiper was able to save himself with the remaining men and reach Narib. On 4 December 1904 he took part in the storming of Reitmont and was at the capture of the dockyards at Uibis on 21 December 1904. After additional fighting at Haruchas on 3 January 1905, and at Urigams on 4 January 1905, the enemy was finally defeated on 7 January 1905 at Urikuribus.

After transfer to Stampriedfontein, Gochas and Gibeon, Peiper came down with malaria. After his recovery, he took part in the mopping up at Hudup-Kutip and the storming of the Gamagam Heights. On 25 April 1905 Peiper rode to Gochas as ordered by headquarters, to bring the peace proclamation of the Protectorate Force's Commander, Generalleutnant von Trotha, to von Estorff. He was afflicted with a facial infection in Ketmannshop, the consequence of stone splinters which had hit him in the nose during the fighting at Uibis. In August 1905, he came down with dysentery and was taken to Bethanien. Peiper went to Lüderitz Bay in October as a convalescent and returned to Germany soon after. He was 40% combat disabled by then and received the Militär-Ehrenkreuz (Military Honor Cross). From 1907 to 1908 he belonged to Silesian Supply Trains Battalion No. 6.5

On 20 December 1908, Leutnant Peiper became engaged to Charlotte Schwartz in Berlin (born 15 January 1879), the daughter of the deceased building contractor Gustav Schwartz and his wife, Marie Caroline (b. Kühtz). One year later, on 28 December 1909, they were married in the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin. The ceremony was conducted by the Potsdam Court Preacher Schmidt, who had fought with Peiper in Africa. Peiper continued as a soldier and in 1909 was with Alsatian Supply Trains Battalion No. 15, receiving his promotion to Oberleutnant in 1910. His two sons, Hasso and Horst, were born in 1910 and 1912. In 1913 Woldemar Peiper was in Rhine Supply Trains Battalion No. 21. After his promotion to Rittmeister on 27 January 1914, he took over command of the 4th Squadron of Silesian Supply Trains Battalion No. 6 (May 1914).

During the few months before the beginning of the war he must have left the Prussian Army, since during WW I, as a Hauptmann, he was listed as an "inactive officer recalled to duty". He became adjutant of the 43 Supply Trains Battalion. His son Joachim came into the world in January 1915. In the fall of 1915 Peiper was in the 2nd Squadron of the 3rd Supply Trains Battalion, but because of a severely weakened heart

found himself in Reserve Military Hospital II in Berlin-Spandau until 14 September 1915.6 Concerning his later activities during the war, it is only known that he was attached to a Turkish Military Mission in 1916 and was a part of the German transport contingent in Turkey (Infanterie-Regiment 77). In 1917 he was in action on the Western Front. Among other decorations, Hauptmann Peiper was awarded the Iron Cross, First and Second Class, and the Wound Badge in Black.

His brother Georg, coming from the 3rd company of Silesian Infanterie-Regiment No. 156, became Hauptmann in 1914. He participated in the World War in various command and staff positions, leaving the army as a major.<sup>7</sup>

#### Peiper's Youth in Berlin: 1919 to 1935

After the end of the war in November 1918 and the collapse of Imperial Germany, the German army returned home, undefeated. Hauptmann Woldemar Peiper – the Prussian – was discharged from the army and initially stayed in Berlin with his family. When the unrest and fighting provoked by Polish rebels broke out in Silesia, Peiper – the Silesian – volunteered to participate in the fighting to liberate his old homeland. For this he was awarded the Silesian Defense Medal, the Silesian Eagle 1st Class

After finally returning to Berlin, Peiper made a new life for himself as a state lottery official, which enabled him to provide a solid standard of living for his family after the period of privation and inflation. The Peiper family consisted of five people. The first child, Baltzer Sebastian Woldemar Mischa Hans Hasso Hubertus, came into the world on 20 October 1910 and on 2 April 1912, Horst Eberhard Gustav Ludwig Wolfgang Christian Gotthold was born. On 30 January 1915, on a Saturday, at 2:30 in the morning, the third child, Joachim Sigismund Albrecht Klaus Arved Detlev came into the world in the parent's apartment at Zähringer Straße 17. The Peiper family except for the father who was away at war - had moved into this newly constructed, four-story state building in Berlin-Wilmersdorf shortly before. There they lived only three blocks away from the famous one mile promenade, the Kurfürstendamm, to which they were directly connected via the Brandenburger Straße. The Peipers occupied a roomy apartment on the second floor, consisting of four rooms, a storage area, a bathroom and a kitchen. It had central heating, hot water and an elevator. They paid a monthly rent of 99.50 marks.1

As there are very few authentic sources concerning Peiper's childhood and youth, a detailed description of these years has to be limited to those few facts which can be documented. Joachim, whom everyone called Jochen, spent the first year of his life in the shelter of his parent's home. By the end of the war in 1918, he was three and a half years old. Following the critical period of the attempted rebellion in Berlin, Jochen was baptized on his sixth birthday, 30 January 1921, in the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church.<sup>2</sup> He was an alert, lively, and healthy boy, who was bothered by none of the childhood diseases aside from whooping-cough.<sup>3</sup>

Starting in 1921, Jochen attended the Grade School II in Halensee at Joachim-Friedrich-Straße 36 and, after 1925, the Goethe Middle School at Gasteiner Straße 11 in Wilmersdorf. His brother Horst, who was three years older, also attended the Goethe Middle School but later went to the Kämpf Middle

School, which was affiliated with the Gymnasium (college preparatory high school) in Berlin-Kolln.<sup>4</sup> The young Jochen Peiper spent his youth in the pulsating German capital with its variety and vitality. He became acquainted with inflation and economic crises and their consequences, but he himself grew up protected in the solid atmosphere of Berlin's middle class. He spent a great deal of time with his brother Horst.

Berlin is rich in possibilities for play and leisure, so that the brothers were always busy in their free time. In the summer, Wannsee and Schlachtensee Lakes were favorite places. Jochen and Horst had a small boat which they often took out. In 1926, at eleven, Jochen entered the German Boy Scouts, where he later became a group leader.5 His brother Horst also joined the Boy Scouts after October 1927. 6 As a school boy, Jochen brought home good grades. He was also active in various sports, such as swimming, pentathlon, fencing and handball, all of which he excelled in. The eldest brother, Hans Hasso, did not join in the activities of his brothers and pursued completely different interests. As an esthete, he studied literature and occupied himself with completely different subjects. He had arguments with his father and his brothers which bothered him. As a result of these and other internal conflicts, he attempted suicide while he was in high school. He never recovered from the attempt and was admitted to "St. Joseph's Hospital for Gentlemen with Emotional and Nervous Disorders" in Berlin-Wießensee on 14 November 1931, where he was treated for schizophrenia. As a result of the lack of oxygen that occurred during the suicide attempt, numerous brain cells were killed which resulted in no chance for recovery. Hasso's mother went to Weißensee daily to take her son the food she had prepared for him.7

The school boys, Jochen and Horst Peiper, did not participate in any political activity and belonged to no organization such as the Hitlerjugend or the Jungvolk. In Berlin they experienced the increasing struggle for power among the adherents of various political leanings. They saw and heard about the increasingly frequent occurrence of street fighting, which involved armed attacks resulting in dead and wounded. In Berlin, men of the SA and even members of the Hitlerjugend were murdered by Communists. During 1931, 1932 and even as late as 1933, the dead mounted up on the different sides. The population took a great interest in the fate of those murdered. For example, when murdered SA-Mann Reppich was buried at Schöneberg, 400,000 Berliners accompanied him on his trip to the grave.

The restless Rheinländer, Dr. Gobbels, who had founded the NSDAP in Berlin on 15 November 1926, captured the city for National Socialism. The movement was also active in Peiper's quarter of the city and the old guard of the Wilmersdorf SA met in the Victoria Gardens. On 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed as Chancellor of the Reich in Berlin. Jochen Peiper turned 18 years old that day. There is no evidence that Peiper actively participated in NSDAP organizations, the Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend or HJ) or other groups, during this period. Along with the Boy Scouts, Peiper also belonged to the Greater German Youth League as a group leader.8 In the spring of 1933, the Boy Scouts were incorporated into the HJ and the young Peiper was transferred into the Jungvolk as a leader.9 At that time, the Jungvolk was still strongly influenced by the ideals of the organized youth leagues, and thus hikes, tents, and campfires were important things in the lives of the young people. Horst Peiper

belonged to the HJ from the spring of 1933 to February 1934 and, after August 1933, was active in the German Air Sport Club <sup>10</sup>, where he was active in gliding.

Jochen Peiper continued to be a good student and he was particularly interested in subjects such as history, German, and foreign languages. He was by no means an overachiever, however. The young, blond son of a Berliner received a good grounding in the humanities during these years at the Goethe Middle School, which would serve to his advantage for the rest of his life. He was later able to cite examples and comparisons effortlessly from the great literary works of both antiquity and more recent times and couldn't conceal the stamp of the classically educated humanist.

As with many of his classmates, Peiper enjoyed a student subscription to the theater. He attended the afternoon performances at the Schiller Theater, where primarily classical works of the stage and music were performed. These later became lesson themes in school in German and music classes. Peiper experienced the original versions of various artists at the theater: Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, Kleist, Shakespeare, Wildenbruch, Freytag, Molière, Goldini.

During a number of vacation trips of several weeks duration, he became acquainted with Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Austria. <sup>11</sup> His parents' families were intact, and Jochen frequently visited his grandmother Clara in Breslau, until she died at the age of 86 in 1930 as a result of an auto accident. <sup>12</sup> Jochen already had his driver's license in 1933. In July of that year, he participated in a month-long field sport course by the Federal Board for the Development of Fitness in Youth, which was conducted by noncommissioned officers of the Reichswehr. <sup>13</sup>

Horst and Jochen heard much from their father about his service both with the Imperial Protectorate Force in South West Africa and in the First World War. Moreover, at that time there was a supply of literature available which covered a broad range of topics on these subjects and which was widely read and highly regarded, regardless of the readers' political leanings.

The brothers were introduced early to all this, but were also aware that the Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic was merely a shadow of a proper military force because of the oppressive clauses of the Dictates of Versailles. Even so, both young men had discovered a passion for the profession of a soldier. With regard to Peiper's desire to become a soldier and an officer, the stories of the boys' domineering father concerning his service in far-off Africa and on the Western Front in World War I had relatively little influence. Of more importance in this connection was Peiper's fundamental interest in Prussian and German history. But this, too, was also not completely decisive as a motivational factor. Captivating films contributed to the identification of the young people with Germany - and not just among the educated middle-class. An example of such films was Die letzte Kompagnie (The Last Company), one of the first sound films made in Prussia, which had its premiere in March 1930 at the UFA-Palast near the zoo. It depicted the self-sacrificing defense of a mill by a Prussian company against Napoleon's troops. All of this occurred years before Adolf Hitler entered the lives of these young people. Moreover, the tempting incentive to leave his parents' house contributed to Peiper's decision.

Horst Peiper had already left school after reaching the senior level and in August 1933 took a position in the new Reichsluft-fahrtministerium (Federal Air Travel Ministry in Berlin). <sup>14</sup> For a while, a career in sports was a possibility for Jochen. His abilities in pentathlon, fencing, swimming and handball were extraordinarily good. Despite that, he decided to join the profession of arms. Shortly before Christmas 1934 Jochen Peiper wrote about his plans for the future:

From my early youth it had been self-evident to me that I would become a soldier. For that reason, I concerned myself with many military things, among them participation in a field sport course given by the Federal Board for the Development of Fitness in Youth and, later, I was a group leader in my school's military sports detachment. 15

Joachim Peiper intended to enter the Reichswehr's Reiter-Regiment 4 as a Fahnenjunker (officer candidate). With that decision, he had selected one of the most elite of all the regiments. The regiment, stationed in Potsdam, was the official successor of the traditions and lineage of several old and famous imperial regiments. For example, the 1. Eskadron (1 squadron) was affiliated with the Gardes du Corps, probably the most famous Prussian unit. The 2, 3, 4, and 6 Squadrons carried on the traditions of the Cuirassier Guard Regiment, the 1 and 2 Ulan Guard Regiments and the Hussar Lifeguard Regiment. In order to learn how to ride before his entrance into the army, Jochen Peiper joined the Allgemeine-SS on 12 October 1933 and was assigned to the 1 Charlottenburg Sturm (company equivalent) of SS-Reiterstandarte 7. <sup>16</sup>

SS-Reiterstandarte 7 was a Berlin regiment established on 27 April 1933. Its staff was in Berlin, while two of the Sturms were located in Landsberg an der Warthe. In Berlin, the SS was supported by a long-standing tradition and, like the HJ and SA, had made numerous sacrifices for its ideals during the period of struggle. Peiper had lived through this period and had unpleasant memories of the assaults and street fighting in Berlin right up into 1933. In any case, by far the largest number of the old fighters were to be found in the Berlin SS-Regimenter 6, 42 and 75. The Reiterstandarten of the SS were units which brought a variety of men together, among them former cavalry officers, riders, middle class youths, school boys, high school graduates, and university students. In the black uniformed SS, they saw an elite order, which enjoyed considerable public respect and which exercised a strong, mysterious attraction on many of them. The orders' ethics and its interpretation of history were very closely related to those of traditional conservatism and the so-called conservative revolution, which found participants at every level of society. Numerous riding associations in Holstein, Hanover, Oldenburg and East Prussia joined the SS Cavalry in their entirety. 17

The high school student, Jochen Peiper, had to submit to thorough examinations – both medical and for racial purity – list his ancestors back to 1800 and submit a certificate of good character from the police. The commander of the SS Reiter-Regiment 7 was SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. August Schwedler. The 1. Sturm consisted of four platoons and Peiper was a member of the 1. Halbsturm (1 Half-Sturm), which was quartered at Grolman Straße 47 in Charlottenburg. The Sturm had 34 horses of its own, which were kept in the Düppler Stalls. The horses and tack were the property of the Sturm. In contrast to Sturm

service in the foot regiments of the SS, service in SS Reiter-Regiment 7 took on a more sporting character, and organized some of its training in unit and individual riding, in major field exercises and in the autumn steeple chases.<sup>18</sup>

SS-Anwärter (SS-candidate) Joachim Peiper continued to attend school and in his free time rode with his Halbsturm and did stable duty in the stalls. With his entry into the Allgemeine-SS Peiper had taken a major step into social exclusiveness. To wear the elegant black uniform on many afternoons as a student and to belong to the Schutzstaffel filled the young Berliner with pride. Famous German equestrians were riding in the uniform of the SS Cavalry, such as Günther Temme who, in the 16th German Jumping Derby in 1935, became the first in the derby's history to win with a faultless ride.<sup>19</sup>

On 23 January 1934 Peiper was enrolled as an SS-Mann, and received SS-Number 132496. SS-Hauptscharführer Gustav Lombard was the commander of his Halbsturm. The Pomeranian had been studying agronomy in the United States at the outbreak of World War I and returned to Germany in 1919, where he worked for the Chrysler Corporation in Berlin and managed the largest automotive maintenance business in Germany. In May 1933, he joined the 1. Sturm of the SS Reiter-Regiment 7 and commanded the 1. Halbsturm. After two exercises in the Reichswehr's Reiter-Regiment 4 – Peiper's career objective – Lombard began to gather the youngest men in his platoon:

With three platoon leaders who had served in the old army – one of whom who was IIa of the Bavarian 4. Kavalleriebrigade at the end of the war – and with a riding instructor who was famous everywhere in the world of riding, I then had "my riders" – young high school and college students – trained militarily according to the American drill – as I had learned in Missouri – and with the 4. Reiter-Regiment – as "mounted infantry". 20

The 19-year old Peiper also belonged to these young riders and he wrote: "In August 1934 I was enrolled in the group in the Sturm designated for special training and then became an acting squad leader". He took his oath of service on 2 August 1934. From 4 to 10 September 1934, Peiper participated in the Germany-wide Party Day in Nuremberg – "Triumph of the Will".

The 1. Sturm of the SS-Reiter-Regiment 7 had a special duty during this annual major event. It formed a platoon of specially selected men, whose duty was to be at the service of foreign diplomats during event. Because of his pleasant appearance, his manner, and his conduct, 19-year old SS-Mann Peiper was also included in the "Diplomat Platoon" in 1934.<sup>23</sup>

During this party event, an encounter took place which would give the decisive impetus to Peiper's life. He crossed paths with Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler and provoked the latter's curiosity. Himmler spoke to him and asked him about his background and career goals. When Himmler discovered that the good-looking, young high school student from Berlin was striving for a career as an officer in the Reichswehr, he suggested he become an officer in the SS-Verfügungstruppe (VT). Peiper must have agreed, especially since he knew that the Abitur (graduation degree from a college preparatory school) was not a requirement for becoming an officer with the SS-VT, as it was with the Reichswehr, and that he could reach his goal more quickly. On this 7 September 1934, Himmler promoted Peiper

to SS-Sturmmann. Peiper used his connection with the Reichsführer to his advantage several times later while with the SS-VT.<sup>24</sup>

The diplomatic corps present in Nuremberg paid a visit to the SS camp in Himmler's company and included Dr. Frick, Dr. Goebbels, von Neurath, the German ambassadors and emissaries von Hassell, Prince zu Wied, von Mackensen, and many others. After the inspection, Himmler invited the diplomats to refreshments, which was followed immediately by the great tattoo presented by the Leibstandarte's Music Corps.<sup>25</sup>

Himmler's encounter with Peiper in this way - out of the 11,000 SS men in Nuremberg – and his subsequent personal interest in Peiper, must have been an accident. However, such personal interest in individual SS men was a frequent characteristic of Himmler's.26 It may be assumed that Peiper's promotion to SS-Rottenführer on 15 October 1934 - after only one year in the Allgemeine-SS - may be traced back to his conversation with Himmler. It can be safely assumed that he talked about his encounter in his Sturm. In any case, Peiper was then determined to leave the Goethe High School as soon as possible, without receiving the Abitur, in order to join the SS-Verfügungstruppe (which later became the Waffen-SS) as an officercadet. Jochen discussed his intentions with his parents in detail and his father finally agreed. He had been familiar with his son's desire to become an officer for a long time. As he could put himself in his son's place only too well, he also saw no obstacle in the fact that Jochen no longer wished to become an officer in the Reichswehr, but in the SS-Verfügungstruppe. However, he was certainly not pleased at his intention not to take the test for graduation, since the members of his family had always received the Abitur. On 21 December 1934 Woldemar Peiper gave written permission for Jochen to enter "active service in the SS as an officer-candidate".27

It is interesting in this connection that the idea of officer cadets generally didn't exist in either the SS in general or even in the SS-Verfügungstruppe.28 In order to eliminate outside privileges of social class or education, an officer's career in the SS was basically open to everyone. The Abitur was a basic requirement for an officer's career in the army, but that didn't mean that an Abitur graduate could expect an officer's career in the SS.29 The candidates who were considered for an officer's career were selected exclusively on the basis of accomplishments in their unit and, after a noncommissioned officers course at that level, they were sent to an officer-candidate school. The idea of officer applicant was not officially introduced into the SS until 2 December 1940.30 Peiper sent his application through the SS Main Section - East in Berlin: "I respectfully request an appointment in the active SS as an officer candidate and I declare myself prepared to devote my life to a career as an SS officer".31

On 21 December 1934, in his personnel file for the SS-Verfügungstruppe, he wrote: "As I will be unable to take my final examination before Easter of 1936, I intend to leave school and wish to devote myself to the career of a high-ranking SS officer". 32 At first, it is striking that this 19-year old has set his sights on a career goal of becoming a "high-ranking" SS officer and does not appear satisfied with merely becoming an SS officer. The designation of high-ranking SS-officer could, however, refer back to the formulation used by Himmler during his

conversation with Peiper.33

During Christmas 1934, Peiper left the Goethe High School in Berlin-Wilmersdorf with a school diploma.

On 3 January 1935, he was examined by the surgeon of SS-Reiter-Regiment 7, Dr. Poeck, who noted after the routine examination: "At first, I had reservations because of the heart results". This is the first time that official notice was taken of Peiper's heart problem, which will be referred to later. The 19-year old Peiper was 5' 10" tall and weighed 132 pounds.

In spite of a few medical reservations, he received a green light for everything which concerned his medical qualifications for enlistment in the SS-Verfügungstruppe. The commander of Peiper's Half Sturm wrote in his daily report on the same day:

The SS-Rottenführer Joachim Peiper has served in the Halbsturm of Charlottenburg 1./R. 7 since 12 October 1933. His continuous attention to duty, his diligence and his military enthusiasm are exemplary; as a result, in spite of his youth, he has been nominated for assignment as an assistant squad leader. 35

On 4 January 1934, the SS-Reichsführung (SS High Command) gave telephonic approval to the SS Main Section East for Peiper to begin participating effective 6 January 1935 in a course for officer cadets which was already underway in Jüterbog.<sup>36</sup>

#### With the SS-Verfügungstruppe, Officer Candidate Course in Jüterbog: 6 January to 24 April 1935

On 6 January 1935, Peiper reported for duty at the Old Camp in the Jüterbog Troop Training Area south of Berlin. The Officer Cadet Course, which had already been in progress since 1 November 1934, was in no way a part of the Leibstandarte (contrary to the information in the Leibstandarte's chronicles), and the participants were neither transferred nor attached to that unit.1 The overwhelming majority of the participants in the course weren't from the SS-Verfügungstruppe but from the Allgemeine-SS and other organizations, with numerous Abitur graduates among them.<sup>2</sup> The selection criteria varied widely. In some regiments of the Allgemeine SS, they merely asked who wanted to participate in an SS Officer Cadet Course!3 The course conducted by SS-Hauptsturmführer Sator was organized into two course detachments, which were led by SS-Untersturmführer Füllgraf (and not Oberscharführer Künstler as is stated in the Leibstandarte's Chronicles) and by SS-Oberscharführer Gerullis. Each was at company strength. Each course detachment consisted of four squads of 20 men each.4 The instructors had been provided by the Leibstandarte. 5

The course had already been in progress for two months when Peiper joined along with Dr. Rüdiger von Bodungen.<sup>6</sup> Peiper was a member of the 2nd Course Detachment, and his squad leader was SS-Unterscharführer Rudolf Lehmann from the 10. Kompanie of the Leibstandarte. Lehmann would later become its operations officer, and by the end of the war would be a holder of the Oak Leaves to the Knights Cross, an SS-Standartenführer and the commander of the "Das Reich" Division. One of Peiper's instructors, Rottenführer Paul Albert Kausch of the Leibstandarte's 4. Kompanie, remembers:

Jochen Peiper, Rüdinger von Bodungen, Max Kühn, etc. were in my group. I took a lot of trouble with them and I believe it paid off, for they all graduated as suitable. I had personal contact with Jochen because he was a born soldier and had all the necessary qualifications. You would have thought that he already knew everything. I knew that at that time he already belonged to the best and he showed this during the school. 7

Kausch finished his career as a SS-Standartenführer, holder of the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross and commander of the SS-Panzer Regiment 11 "Hermann von Salza" of the "Nordland" Division.

Among others, members of Peiper's squad included Paul Hüttig, Max Kühn, Hans Sonnenstuhl, Joachim Stoige, Helmut Barthelmes, Günter Faroß, Dr. Rüdiger von Bodungen, Günter Penkert, Krüger, Kohlsdorf, and Hampke.<sup>8</sup> The Spandau HJ-Unterbannführer Richard Schulze (-Kossens), SS-Sturmmann Max Wünsche from the SS-Sports Academy at Wolfenbüttel, Josef Swientek, Dr. Hajo Freiherr von Hadlen, and Harald von Saucken participated in this course.

The training took place exclusively at Jüterbog and was designed to discover those who possessed the necessary qualifications for an SS officer candidate and could be sent to an SS officer school. The course was the equivalent of a preparatory course, not an NCO course.<sup>9</sup>

The position of the SS officer cadets wasn't given official status by the SS Main Office until the end of 1940, in order to offer greater inducement to volunteers who had passed the Abitur. This was an open contradiction of the basic selection criteria of the SS, according to which an officer's career was open to anyone, irrespective of their formal education or social origins. This principle continued to be observed. Before the war and starting in 1938, an eight-week officer cadet course was carried out in the SS regiments as a preparatory course, to give training as unit leaders to those soldiers selected for officer candidate school after nine to twelve months service with the troops.<sup>10</sup>

Peiper had entirely missed out on this one year of training and daily life with the troops. However, during the officer cadet course he didn't seem to have any insoluble problems, according to the reports of his fellow graduates and superiors. So rank held before the course was of no significance; everyone in the officer cadet course at Jüterbog wore the same dirt-brown denim uniform. Duty was hard and, except for Christmas, there were no passes or leave granted. In his curriculum vitae, composed on 14 January 1935 in Jüterbog, Peiper wrote: "... however, I decided, on the basis of a personal request by the Reichsführer SS Himmler ... to select a career as a higher ranking SS-officer".

On 23 February 1935 Peiper received his first evaluation by the commander of the 2nd Course Detachment.

In spite of his youth, officer cadet Joachim Peiper is a resolute, energetic, and confident man, very intelligent, and carries out the tasks assigned to him with the necessary enthusiasm and seriousness. As a result of his enthusiasm and love for the service, he has succeeded, in spite of his short time with the course (since January 1935), not only in keeping up with all the course requirements, but has surpassed many of his comrades by a wide margin. He is a very smart soldier, perfect at inspections, and an exemplary comrade. He is thoroughly fit to be an

officer. 14

It is certainly surprising to read this good evaluation, as Peiper had been given no basic military training before this and could only fall back on his limited experience with the Allgemeine SS and his father's advice. Everything else he accomplished by his will, his quick grasp of things, and his intelligence. This is the source of his instructor, Paul Albert Kausch, commenting that Peiper was a "born soldier" and already "one of the best". Kausch, the future wearer of the Oak Leaves and regimental commander, undoubtedly possessed the necessary competence for such an evaluation, as he had been a member of the Leibstandarte since 1933 and had a year and a half of service with the troops behind him.<sup>15</sup>

On 1 March 1935, Peiper became an SS-Unterscharführer, a promotion which originated from the SS-Reiterstandarte 7.16 The course was visited by SS-Standartenführer Paul Hausser and SS-Obersturmbannführer Ernst Deutsch. The commander of the SS Officer School at Bad Tölz, SS-Standartenführer Paul Lettow, inspected the men.17 On 7 April 1935, Peiper received his final evaluation for the course, which stated: "Officer Cadet Joachim Peiper has passed the requirements and is transferred to the Braunschweig Officer School" 18

The Army's Psychological Testing Board X examined Peiper on 1 April 1935 and reached the following conclusions in its secret evaluation of the results:

The subject is intelligent and strong willed; however, he has a tendency to cut himself off from other people and to withdraw into a world of mistrust and prejudice. Psychologically, it is not clear whether this behavior is an expression of a basic trait or just an expression of the mood swings of puberty. He can think in a purposeful, orderly manner, with sufficient clarity; recognizes the essential and logical consequences. However, he frequently needs encouragement and incitement, as he becomes easily uncooperative, digresses and losses initiative. In general, he provides no clear picture with respect to an assessment of his intellect. At times he seems sly (for example, diplomatically artful attempts to make an impression with his "good connections"); then at other times, he shows himself to be reflective and prudent or again uninterested and desultory, following the suggestions of his imagination. His judgment is still immature, inexact, and quite hasty, especially with regard to other people.

In general, he has a considerable tendency to unjustified fault-finding and is very negative. He is unable to open-up naturally without anxiety, probably restricted by his sensitivity and a certain egocentric tendency. He hides this shyness readily behind a brusque or sarcastic self-assured tone. If this is an expression of a basic trait, there is a danger that he could become a difficult, know-it-all subordinate, an unsympathetic/ironic comrade, or an overbearing superior. However, it is within the bounds of psychological possibility that he will lose these characteristics with increasing maturity and proper training.

He handled the practical tests with foresight and premeditation, but without organizational ability and with little regard for practical necessities and purposes. He did not display adequate stability when faced with interruptions and disturbances.

He possesses adequate will and enterprise. His will expresses itself in hard, impulsive surges which are repeated persistently. He shows himself to be eager to achieve and enthusiastic. He can devote himself to a task to the limit of his powers, without regard for his own well-being. 19

Oberstleutnant Wolff, who was the military commander of this testing board, barely granted Peiper a rating no better than "conditionally fit".<sup>20</sup>

The kind of questioning to which he was subjected by two army psychologists and their colleagues could have awakened a certain annoyance in Peiper, which would have influenced his answers accordingly. And this would have been evaluated negatively by the psychologists. However, it remains uncertain why the psychologists applied such strict standards to such a young man as Peiper, and apparently expected that in spite of his age of 20 years he would present an entirely mature and firm personality, which had left behind all expressons of puberty.

Finally, Peiper told his fellow squad member Hüttig that at the end of the test he was asked if he wouldn't want to join the elite Infanterie-Regiment 9 which maintained the traditions of the Prussian Guard. He had refused, indicating his familiarity with both the army and the SS-VT. All graduates of the course who had satisfied its requirements and who were being sent to the officer school were subjected to this aptitude test by the Psychological Testing Board. It should be mentioned that there were strong differences between the evaluations of that board and those of the officer schools.<sup>21</sup>

## At the Braunschweig SS Officer Academy: 24 April 1935 to 30 March 1936

The course in Jüterbog finished on 24 April 1935 and immediately afterwards Peiper's officer course began at the Braunschweig Officer Academy, as it was called during the period he was there. The term Junker Academy wasn't introduced until later. On 24 April 1935 Peiper entered the ducal castle of Welfe in Braunschweig at the Platz der SS (SS Square). The officer academy there was the second one established after the one at Bad Tölz and had only just opened on 1 February 1935. The former Reichswehr Generalleutnant Paul Hausser, then an SS-Standartenführer, was School Commander. The first course was organized into three instructional groups and eight lecture-hall sections. 240 cadets participated.

Hausser described the first course:

With regard to the training plans and schedules, these were fully consistent with the regulations and ideas of the Wehrmacht, as established by Training Command Inspectorate in the War Ministry...

Tactics, leadership, terrain evaluation, acquaintance with other branches, military affairs, overview of the Luftwaffe, logistics, and motor transport services were given priority. These theoretical studies were supplemented by practical training to improve familiarity with weapons and to provide field exercises. There were also riding and sports. The training and education provided to build character were the responsibility of the study-group leaders and the inspecting officers, who were also responsible for the individual lecture hall sections. The political education was insignificant in comparison to this technical training. Military history and foreign languages were not taught. \(^1\)

Peiper belonged to Study Group II commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Lochmüller. SS-Obersturmbannführer Goetze, the former Reichswehr Oberst von Einem, SS-Sturmbannführers Freiherr von Scheele, Kleinheisterkamp and von Paris were tactics instructors. SS-Hauptsturmführer Voigt was weapons instructor. The instructor for combat engineers was SS-Hauptsturmführer Erich May; for political instruction SS-Hauptsturmführer Eysell and SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Diehl. SS-Untersturmführer Weizdörfer was the sports instructor, and formal drill on the castle courtyard was carried out by SS-Sturmbannführer Tzschoppe. There were also riding lessons - which were easy for Peiper - where the candidates were taken by bus to the riding hall located outside the bounds of the school.<sup>2</sup> The riding instructor was SS-Obersturmführer Magill.3 The candidates wore the black SS-uniform and their left collar tab displayed a B for Braunschweig next to the SS runes on the right. The cuff title bore: "SS-Schule Braunschweig."4

One of Peiper's roommates was Karl Sattler, who was distinguished with the Knight's Cross in 1945 as an SS-Sturmbannführer. He found Peiper to be reserved, pleasant and a good comrade.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, he provides some confirmation with regard to the contents of Peiper's evaluation by the Army Testing Board on 1 April 1935. There was a certain Herbert Kuhlmann in Sattler's group who also ran into Peiper. Sattler remembers that Kuhlmann was in no way close to Peiper, whom he would meet again in 1943 under quite different circumstances.<sup>6</sup> On 1 July 1935, Peiper was appointed as an SS-Junker.<sup>7</sup>

Jochen Peiper's brother Horst, just three years his senior, had also found his way into the SS-Verfügungstruppe on 17 June 1935. He became a member of the 12. Kompanie of SS-Regiment "Germania" in Wolterdingen. Previously, in August 1933, he had entered the Reichsluftfahrtministerium by way of the Deutscher Luftsportverband (German Air Sport Association) and there filled ... a position of trust in a military staff which was concerned with the constitution of the Luftwaffe. From there, during the next year and a half, I was detailed to a series of air bases, where I was trained as an observer for combat aircraft. In the spring of 1935 I was to enter the Luftwaffe as an officer candidate, but I took this opportunity to opt for the VT, which I then joined as an officer candidate, as I believed that in the Luftwaffe my strong political interests would come up short. Then too, one of my brothers had started down the path for becoming an SS officer, a course of action which appealed greatly to me. 8

Doubtless the example of his brother Joachim weighed in Horst's decision to become a soldier in the SS-Verfügungstruppe as well. Moreover, the opportunity to become an officer relatively rapidly through ability and without the Abitur as a prerequisite, was obviously attractive to him. It is striking that Horst Peiper also wrote about his status as an officer candidate, a status which officially did not exist.

On 25 July 1935 Jochen Peiper was supposed to have reported for induction at Wehrbezirkskommando IX (Military District Command IX) in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. The officer school reported that Peiper was on active duty there and, for that reason, wouldn't be present for induction.<sup>9</sup>

Peiper's instructor at Jüterbog, Paul Albert Kausch, also participated in the course:

Although we were in different groups, we saw each other often and we got along. After the platoon leader course, we went our separate ways, he in various staffs and the LAH and I into "Totenkopf" units, then Steiner's adjutant in "Wiking" and, finally, the III. SS-Panzer-Korps. I continued to follow his development with great interest, as we thought and acted in the same way, although he was one level higher level than I was. 10

From 10 to 16 September 1935 Peiper participated in the Party Day in Nuremberg. After a practical and theoretical mid-course examination, he was promoted to SS-Standartenjunker on 9 November 1935. In Munich at midnight on this day, Peiper was sworn in at the Feldherrnhalle, which was lit up by hundreds of torches. Otto Baum, a course participant in Section IIa, who ended the war as an Oberführer with the Oak Leaves and Swords to the Knight's Cross and having commanded three SS divisions, recalled:

I have the fondest memories of the time at Braunschweig. We were well trained, treated decently, and had good quarters. A failing in our tactical training appeared later, as we had been trained as pure assault soldiers and it was only later in action that we got experience with defense tactics. <sup>12</sup>

The officer candidates were trained in tactics, military affairs, terrain evaluation, weapons use, weapons instruction, combat engineering, general troop duties, riding, political philosophy, communications, motor transport, calisthenics, air service and drawing. The training in political philosophy at the officer candidate schools has been an object of continuous, unqualified and unjust interpretations by critics of the Waffen-SS. It should be regarded as a class for character development, where German and European history, the code of conduct and its development, the role played by Germany during that period, government, art history, and economics were taught. Character orientation was given priority, so that four hours of political philosophy were taught each week.<sup>13</sup> According to Peiper's recollection, the political philosophy training was not a favorite among the officer candidates.<sup>14</sup>

After Peiper had passed the final examination in every subject in January 1936, he received his diploma signed by Paul Hausser on 31 January, which attested to "overall rather good performance". His course leader, SS-Hauptsturmführer Lochmüller, graded him as: "Very good in front of soldiers and in the lecture hall. Very good ability and performance. Very industrious and good powers of judgment. Hard on himself and others. A born soldier. Fully mature in spite of his youth. Responsible. Self-sacrificing comrade who possesses a good character. Suitable officer "material". 15

The contrast here with the results of the examination by the Psychological Testing Board is striking. Above all, after several months of very close observation, Peiper was then considered "fully mature in spite of his youth".

The officer candidates attended a final roll call and afterward the groups sponsored evening get-togethers to which the instructional staff were invited along with the group leaders. <sup>16</sup> Peiper was awarded the SA Sports Medal in Bronze in March 1936. <sup>17</sup> The last part of the officer school was the platoon leader course, which Peiper attended from 10 February to 30 March 1936 at the Dachau Training Area. The graduates of both the 1st Braunschweig and the 2nd Bad Tölz classes were brought together for this course, conducted by SS-Obersturmbannführer Jürgen

Wagner of the Leibstandarte.<sup>18</sup> Among Peiper's Braunschweig classmates were Otto Baum, Otto Weidinger, August Dieckmann, Paul Albert Kausch, Walter Reder, Herbert Kuhlmann, Albrecht Krügel, Rudolf Mühlenkamp, Robert Frank, Erwin Reichel, Ernst Tetsch, Karl Sattler and Friedrich Herzig – all of whom were later to win the Knight's Cross – and Fritz Eckert, Werner Grothmann, Gneomar Graf von Hoym. They all later commanded regiments and battalions and, in Baum's case, even divisions.<sup>19</sup>

The platoon leader's course also posed no problem for Peiper. On 25 February 1936, he became an SS-Standartenoberjunker. This final part of the course was over on 30 March 1936. Effective 1 April 1936, the Oberjunker were transferred to their new units.

Peiper went to his home town of Berlin to the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler.

## In the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler: 1 April 1936 to 4 July 1938

After these courses, Jochen Peiper was granted leave which he spent at home with his parents in Berlin. On 20 April 1936, he was promoted to SS-Untersturmführer. Around this time and still in civilian clothes, he entered the former Prussian Hauptkadettenanstalt (Main Cadet Academy) at Fincken-steinallee 63 in Berlin-Lichterfelde. The academy, which was so rich in tradition, had become the barracks for the Leibstandarte. Effective 1 April 1936, Peiper had been transferred to the Leibstandarte, where he became platoon leader of the 3. Zug (platoon) of the 11. Kompanie. The platoon orderly, Karl Hollander, recalled: "When he entered our room in civilian clothes – a blue confirmation suit – we didn't believe it possible that this youngster wanted to be a soldier. And so you can imagine our surprise when he introduced himself as our platoon leader".<sup>2</sup>

Peiper's new home, the 11. Kompanie, was known throughout the entire Leibstandarte as the "moonshine" company, a reference to the company commander's delight in night marches and exercises.<sup>3</sup> The company's bayonet knot was yellow, and jokers claimed it was for that reason.

The 11. Kompanie was quartered with the 9. and 10. Kompanien in the Hermann Göring Building of the red brick barracks. The 2. and 3. Züge (platoons) and the company orderly room were on the second floor, the 1. Zug on the 2nd floor. The 11. Kompanie belonged to the III. Bataillon. The company commander was the 33-year-old SS-Hauptsturmführer Carl Marks. SS-Untersturmführer Fritz Zechmeister commanded the 1. Zug, and SS-Untersturmführer Karl-Heinz Schwohn the 2. Zug. Before Peiper arrived, the 3. Zug was commanded by SS-Hauptscharführer Erich Wendt, a former Reichswehr soldier like Marks, who was henceforth employed as a section leader and drill instructor.

At the time Peiper joined it, the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, commanded by SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich, had been in existence for three years and had the character of a Guard unit for the German Reich. Along with the numerous representational duties during visits by heads of state and national celebrations and the provisioning of honor guards, watches and posts in the Reichskanzlei (Reich Chancellery) and the Berghof (Hitler's mountain retreat), elements of the regiment were frequently

involved in further military training in training areas. Because of the variety of special assignments, the duty was strenuous but also varied. The selection criteria which had to be met in order to be accepted as a volunteer by this regiment were the most rigorous in all the SS-Verfügungstruppe. The 21 year-old Peiper could be justifiably proud to be an officer in this elite regiment in Berlin, his home town.

On 2 July 1936, four men of the Leibstandarte's music platoon lost their lives in an accident. On the following day in the barracks, in the presence of Hitler, the I. And III. Bataillone, along with regimental troops, assembled for a memorial service. This was the first official occasion when Peiper was employed with his platoon. What did the men think of their new platoon leader? Wilhelm Schröder recalls:

The first time I saw Peiper, we were cleaning weapons in the corridor. He came up the stairs, and we all just looked at him, a new face. And as he went by, we thought, "He looks like a Hitler Youth". He looked so young. Back then I said: "just a kid".

An example. "When we marched from the barracks square out onto the street we scraped our boots over the ground to annoy him. So he called out; "Feet higher" and, as if on command, all of us scraped our feet again, the entire platoon. He stood there. What could he do. He hadn't encountered anything like that yet.6

But Peiper wasn't going to let that happen a second time. In the future he applied his authority, and he rapidly managed to win not only the respect but the trust of his platoon. He maintained a good relationship with his men, he became both their superior and their comrade. After duty hours, he always sought them out in their rooms to talk to them about their personal concerns and private problems.<sup>7</sup>

Peiper had a room in the barracks, which was located above his men in the Hermann Göring Building. Some of these former lieutenants' chambers were connected to each other by doors. The young officers called their area the Olympic Village. When the situation allowed it, Peiper still slept at home. He kept a motorcycle, an FN, in the cellar of the barracks building.

Peiper did not participate with the men of the company when they went out in the evening into cosmopolitan Berlin. He was known in the company as someone who didn't pass his free time in bars. <sup>10</sup> The soldiers of the 11. Kompanie liked to visit the famous Café Kranzler, where they danced on the 2nd floor. Other frequently visited locales were the Café Klingsor in Steglitz and the Dance Palace in the Finckensteinallee. <sup>11</sup> Peiper took part in one of the socials arranged by the noncommissioned officers of the 11. Kompanie, where the men could bring their girlfriends and wives. Regimental parties took place in the garages in the southern part of the barracks area and in the Zoo's banqueting hall. <sup>12</sup>

Heinrich Heiermann describes his platoon leader:

Even his outward appearance was impressive. Peiper radiated a certain "something".

He was, in my opinion, well liked, and he knew it, but he was still a regular guy with his feet on the ground. He was, as I recall, not only a superior, but also an example and a comrade. Two examples. We moved out for field exercises. In the field there was a deep sand pit, and we had to jump several meters down into it as a test of courage.

Peiper was the first to jump. Occasionally, Peiper went swimming with us in the Teltow Canal in Lichterfelde. As I had not yet really mastered swimming, Peiper tried to teach me in a very patient, fatherly way. (Not much success). I considered Peiper to be very gifted and very intelligent, which his career also shows. As we gradually got to know Peiper, he was, to exaggerate, "in great demand". Even before the war when there was instruction or something similar which had to be done, Peiper had to take care of it for Marks. Marks was having a hard time.<sup>13</sup>

In a very short time the youthful appearing Peiper had developed into a beloved and esteemed platoon leader, thanks to his bearing, his personality and his personal and professional ability.

The officer corps of the Leibstandarte in those days was still very diverse as far as its military competence was concerned, as was the case for the entire SS-Verfügungstruppe.14 Peiper knew that he was intellectually superior to the company commander and the other platoon leaders, but he didn't let it show and was never snooty.15 Moreover, he was considerably younger than the company commander and the other platoon leaders. Although he didn't have their years of experience with the troops, Peiper was regarded as a good and prudent officer. From 9 to 23 July 1936, the III. Bataillon conducted platoon and company exercises. Usually, Peiper carried out his platoon's field training in Tetlow and Heinersdorf. He also conducted its athletic training; he frequently went swimming with his men in the outdoor pool near the Tetlow Canal. Ulrich Fröhlke was hurt during such an excursion when another swimmer dove from the three meter board and landed on Fröhlke's back. He spent a long time in a body cast.

In order to qualify for the Reich Sport Medal, a 300 meter stretch of the Tetlow Canal had to be swum. It was known that SS-Scharführer Karl Grant left the water after the required distance with blisters on his feet, since he ran the last 100 meters with his feet on the canal bottom to reach his goal in the required time.<sup>16</sup>

After the completion of the new swimming hall in the barracks, swimming training was conducted there. On 1 August 1936, the 11th Olympic Games were opened in Berlin and the 11. Kompanie was on barricade duty for the entire period. A few men were assigned as orderlies to the Reichssportführer von Schammer und Osten.<sup>17</sup> As part of his continuing training, Peiper was given the task of writing a paper on Ghenghis Khan. He described the Mongolian commander in detail as well as the rise and creation of what then was the greatest empire to exist on the face of the earth along with its brand new law and governmental system. Peiper had the company clerk, SS-Scharführer Karl Hollander, type the manuscript on his typewriter.<sup>18</sup> Hollander recalled: "Jochen Peiper was a cultivated man with considerable personality, wide knowledge, and great leadership qualities."

During the period from 8 to 14 September, the Leibstandarte participated in the Party Day at Nuremberg. On this occasion the SS-officers who had graduated from the officer candidate school courses 1935/36 – Peiper among them – were presented to Adolf Hitler at the Nuremberg castle.<sup>20</sup> "Today was a great day. The honor daggers were presented to us or, even better, "awarded", by Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler. This after-

noon, we young Sturmführer were received by the Führer in the Hall of the Hohenzollernburg, all individually greeted with a handshake. Following that, the Führer spoke", wrote SS-Untersturmführer Heinz von Westernhagen, who was present.<sup>21</sup> Jochen Peiper also received the dagger of the Reichsführer SS.

Along with the training of his platoon, Peiper was dedicated to the professional development of his noncommissioned officers.<sup>22</sup> A platoon of the 11./LAH under SS-Oberscharführer Ahbaß was assigned to the Winter Olympiad in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of 1937, Peiper conducted a noncommissioned officer course for future drill instructors.<sup>24</sup> Gerhard Julius attended the course: "Peiper was just 21 years old. In spite of his youth, which was emphasized by his athletic bearing, he had a personality which radiated natural authority. As a young soldier, I was impressed by his humane leadership style, his pedagogical capabilities and his above-average, well-rounded education. Most of all, I was impressed by his military proficiency".<sup>25</sup>

At the conclusion of the course, the recruits of the III. Bataillon were assembled into a training platoon under Peiper, and he continued their training, mainly in the field.<sup>26</sup>

Botho Schepke was also a member of the 11. Kompanie. His brother was the famous U-boat commander and Oak Leaves holder, Joachim Schepke. Botho, however, was the exact opposite of his brother.<sup>27</sup> Andreas Hansen served in Peiper's 3. Zug, a brother of Max Hansen who later became a battalion and regimental commander in the Leibstandarte and was awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross.<sup>28</sup> SS-Oberscharführer Paul Guhl was section leader in the 2. Zug. When he assembled the company out onto the parade ground one day, Peiper asked him where his Army Regulations Handbook was. Guhl answered: "I have it in my head!"

Peiper never asked him about it again.<sup>29</sup> Guhl would later enjoy Peiper's tremendous support.

After the officer course from 1 April 1936 to 31 January 1937, Joachim Peiper's brother Horst was promoted to SS-Untersturmführer at the SS officer candidate school at Bad Tölz on 20 April 1937. He then took over the 2. Zug of the 2. Hundertschaft (company equivalent) of SS-Totenkopf-Standarte "Oberbayern" as platoon leader.<sup>30</sup>

From 25 May to 8 June 1937, the Leibstandarte held an exercise in the Lüneberge Heide in the Uelzen District. In addition to platoon-level, reconnaissance, and assault training, the III. Bataillon conducted a meeting engagement against the II. Bataillon

Peiper had completely mastered the duties of an infantry platoon leader and could be sure of his men's acceptance. "He was our superior and a comrade. We trusted him," as a member of his platoon expressed the general attitude of the men.<sup>31</sup> SS-Mann Rudolf Feddern became Peiper's orderly in 1937. After almost 60 years, looking back at Peiper, he wrote: "Even today, I remember that lovely time. Especially since I had a comrade for a friend who was truly above-board, orderly, and full of idealism. He always had a friendly smile".<sup>32</sup>

On 17 June 1937, the III. Bataillon, together with units of the Navy, was assigned as an honor guard at the burial of 23 sailors of the battleship "Deutschland" in Wilhelmshaven. On 25 September 1937, Peiper was with the I and III./LAH at Mussolini's reception in Munich. Between the summer of 1936 and the summer of 1937, Peiper had earned not only a higher-level driver's

license, but also the Rider's Medal in Bronze. For this award, he had to pass a special examination, in which he demonstrated his expertise in dressage by riding a horse according to the requirements of a Class A dressage examination. In addition, Peiper rode a jump course to satisfy the requirements of Class A field jumping and had to demonstrate his theoretical and practical knowledge in the areas of riding instruction, tack, saddling, and the care and maintenance of the horse. He passed all three sections of the examination with good grades.<sup>33</sup> Peiper already had the SA Sport Medal in Bronze; he was awarded the Reich Sports Medal in Bronze in April 1936 and that same year he was awarded the Deutsche-Lebens-Rettungs-Gesellschaft (German Lifesaving Society) Medal (education certificate) in Gold.<sup>34</sup>

At the beginning of October 1937, the III. Bataillon went to the Königsbück Troop Training Area. On 11 December 1937, Peiper and his platoon found themselves doing field training in Berlin. During the training, a soldier hesitated too long in throwing a hand grenade, so that it exploded in the immediate vicinity, and Peiper was wounded in the seat by some shrapnel. He was immediately taken to the SS Military Hospital in Berlin. At Peiper's request, SS-Scharführer Karl Hollander brought him a civilian suit in the hospital, since he had been invited to a party by the battalion commander, Obersturmbannführer Trabandt that same evening.35 In those days, Peiper also participated in the social life of Berlin and, because of his appearance and bearing, was often surrounded by young ladies. His palpable intelligence, the occasional clever, ironic/joking manner of his speech, and his reserved, still youthfully stiff manner devoid of artificiality, made him seem very interesting.

Peiper made no permanent relationships during this period, however. He spent his free time privately, often with SS-Untersturmführer Karl-Heinz Brohl, who had been sent to the Leibstandarte with him from Braunschweig, where he was assigned to the 4. (MG) Kompanie. As an SS-Obersturmführer with the SS-"Totenkopf" -Division he was killed in action during the campaign in France on 21 May 1940. SS-Untersturmführer Kroeger was another of Peiper's friends, who participated in sports with him and who was interested in music and literature.

It is certainly no surprise that the young SS-Untersturmführer Peiper made a pleasant impression everywhere, not only in his company and battalion, but also in society. He was a beloved and respected officer, valued for his human and professional qualities. Questions in this regard among former members of the company who are still living brought forth unanimous confirmation of this positive impression. Heinrich Heiermann amplifies: "As far as popularity is concerned, I would have to say that we all respected him. Marks was proud of him, proud that he had such a "showpiece" officer. Trabandt wanted him as well".36

As a consequence, on February 18 1938, the battalion commander, SS-Obersturmbannführer Trabandt, put him on the staff of the III. Bataillon of the Leibstandarte as adjutant. The battalion staff was located behind the 11. Kompanie building, in front of the unit infirmary. The 47-year-old Berliner, August-Wilhelm Trabandt, had been in World War I as a Leutnant in the 9. Jäger-Bataillon and had fought at Mont Kemel, Cambrais, and Verdun. He had been awarded both Iron Crosses along with other decorations. In 1918/19 he was in Freikorps Diebitsch and later transferred into the Reichswehr as an active officer. Then, in 1935, a Reichswehr Hauptmann, he entered the SS-Verfü-

gungstruppe. He was an experienced, fatherly commander to the battalion and was known everywhere by his nick name "Rummelboxer" ("a boxer who knows the ropes"). The battalion staff clerk remembered the commander and his adjutant;

I never met a better man than Peiper. I had daily contact with him. I had the impression that Peiper was on excellent terms with our commander Trabandt. They were both exemplary, responsible, experienced officers. Peiper was able to learn a lot from Trabandt concerning troop command and even about maneuvers. <sup>37</sup>

In the following month, March 1938, Peiper experienced the annexation of Austria to the German Reich. The men of the Leibstandarte arrived in Vienna, deeply impressed by the tremendous jubilation of the Austrian people. On 31 March 1938, the III. Bataillon was detached from the I. Bataillon. The participants in this historically significant event were later given the Memorial Medal of 13 March 1938. Jochen Peiper received it in 1939.<sup>38</sup>

In 1938, he obtained a Class I driver's license. In the early summer of 1938, a detachment of the 11. Kompanie went to the Obersalzberg but without Peiper. From 15 to 21 June he took part in the District Party Day in Königsberg along with the battalion staff, the regimental band and the 1., 3., 7. and 9. Kompanien.<sup>39</sup> The ship "Tannenberg" brought them from Swinemünde to Königsberg where, among other things, they paid a visit to the East Prussian battlefields of the First World War. At Tannenberg, Peiper's commander, Trabandt, laid a wreath at the tomb of Reich President Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg.

## On the Staff of the Reichsführer SS: 4 July 1938 to 18 May 1940

On 30 June 1938 the Personnel Office of the Leibstandarte responsible for officer training announced: "The Reichsführer SS has directed that SS-Untersturmführer Joachim Peiper, SS No. 132496, Leibstandarte "Adolf Hitler" be assigned to duty on the personal staff of the Reichsführer SS for a period of three months, effective 4 July 1938". So after going through two years of troop training as a platoon leader and battalion adjutant, Peiper answered Himmler's call on 4 July 1938. He thus came into close contact with the man who had intervened decisively in his life once before four years before. The reasons why Himmler asked for him in 1938 can only be guessed at. What is known is that he had been familiar with Peiper since 1934 and, as a result, could have followed his career with the SS-Verfügungstruppe. Hitler, Himmler, von Ribbentrop, Funk, and others took their adjutants from the SS-Verfügungstruppe; it was a normal and frequently practiced procedure. Now Peiper was to serve in an entirely different environment.

This is not the place to attempt to sketch Himmler's complex personality; a factual biography, based on purely objective research founded on scientific principles, is still not available. Here we will only attempt to briefly throw some light on a few salient points concerning his thoughts and intentions during those years, points which Peiper had to deal with as well. A university-trained farmer with a degree in agriculture, Heinrich Himmler became Reichsführer SS (RFSS) when the SS was still an insignificant group, subordinate to the SA and had only 280

members. In the next few years, he built up the SS from these tiny beginnings according to his own precisely defined guidelines. He rapidly expanded the SS and, after 1933, recruits streamed into the SS from every level of society: nobles, academics, the bourgeoisie, businessmen and students, sons of the middle class, farmers and craftsmen. Numerous old names from the German nobility and aristocracy were to be found in SS seniority lists and, in 1938, the nobility made up almost 20% of the Obergruppenführer.<sup>2</sup> The standards of the officer corps were high: 30% of all SS officers had attended a university, of which 12% had passed their state-run graduation exams and 18% had received their doctorate. The SS was so attractive to so many, that Himmler had to suspend admission temporarily in 1933. Supported by his studies of antiquity, the Reichsführer molded the SS according to his ideas of a modern order of knighthood, which he interpreted as a revolutionary noble society and even as the "Third Reich's Black Order of Knights".3

"Never forget, we have much greater tasks then those of soldiers. We are a people, tribe, clan, society; a knightly order which one cannot quit, into which one belongs by blood and to which one remains dedicated, body and soul, as long as he walks this earth".4

He continually tightened the entrance requirements for the SS, which very soon reached criteria defining an elite unit with very few recruits. For example, starting in 1935, every SS candidate, as well as those already serving in the SS, had to trace his ancestry back to 1800, and every SS officer back to 1750. Himmler's emphasis on common Germanic origins and repeated emphasis on the future and cooperation of the north Germanic peoples of northern and central Europe were realized during the war in rudimentary form. He promoted numerous archeological projects with the object of excavating Germanic and medieval sites, and he himself, with his "ancestral heritage" project, launched excursions with the participation of outstanding scientists. Himmler even had expeditions sent to the Himalayas and Tibet.

In addition to the diverse projects of the Allgemeine SS, the Reichsführer built the SS-Verfügungstruppe into a permanent unit, whose high military potential was clearly recognized, even if critically regarded by the army. The public activities were often impressive: for example, the torch-lit, midnight ceremony when the recruits for the SS-Verfügungstruppe took their oath every 9 November in front of the Feldherrnhalle in Munich, as well as the winter and summer solstice celebrations or the King Heinrich memorial celebrations in the crypt of the Quedlinburg Cathedral.

Himmler wanted the virtues of loyalty, obedience, camaraderie, responsibility, diligence, truth, and chivalry to be associated with the attractive black uniform which, to some, had an air of mystery about it. To him, loyalty in particular was always the express credo of the SS man, and the slogan "My honor is loyalty!" was part and parcel of everyday life for every man in the order. His tireless, pedantically expressed advice and exhortations were well known, whether concerning behavior, nourishment, or health. In particular, he investigated the question of more modern, healthy nourishment in great detail, and planned, among other things, for the introduction of nourishment specialists into the SS.

Heinrich Himmler himself had an inconspicuous, unobtrusive appearance. He was easily approachable, open, and willing to

pursue any idea which interested him with industry and enthusiasm. Behind his glasses, his clear eyes expressed interest, looking straight into the eyes of the person he was talking to. He had the gift of listening attentively at length. His interests covered the widest spectrum of topics, but even the smallest details could awaken his attention. The researchers, who were engaged in scientific activity under him, enjoyed great independence in their work, and could be sure of his interest in their results. He was full of plans for the future, and worked actively and eagerly to build up the order. Concerning his efforts, he once said, "... we wish to create a selective ruling class for Germany over the centuries, continually replaced by the best of our sons and daughters, a nobility that will never age ...".5

In a very short time Himmler created a unique code of ethics for the order, established numerous rules, and so laid the foundation for a unique SS tradition. He and his colleagues spoke to the men in SS publications, such as "Das Schwarze Korps" ("The Black Corps") and "Leitheft" ("Guide").

Along with the Allgemeine SS and the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) (Security Service), the SS-Verfügungstruppe was also under Himmler's command. It consisted of the regiments "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler", "Deutschland", "Germania", and "Der Führer" as well as a few battalion-strength units. There were also the SS-Totenkopfverbände (Death's Head units), whose Totenkopf-Standarten were at regimental strength. In addition, there were the officer candidate schools (Junkerschulen), where future military officers were trained. The SS was an organization where, under certain circumstances, one could hold three different ranks simultaneously. For example, if an SS-Obersturmführer of the Allgemeine SS wanted to become a soldier in the SS-Verfügungstruppe, he would normally enter this group as an SS-Mann and had to win promotion through his qualifications and courses. Officers of the SD -even if they had become an officer at an officer candidate school - remained at a lower rank for years after transfer to the SS-Verfügungstruppe.

Himmler also took an interest in the responsibilities of the police, as he became the Chief of the German Police starting in June 1936. He created a close connection between the SS and the police. The Sicherheitsdienst of the Reichsführer SS, created from the smallest of beginnings, soon consisted of qualified SS men, many of whom possessed academic degrees or doctorates of jurisprudence, and it became a very capable intelligence service. In addition, there were experienced officers of the criminal police who transferred to the SD, whose chief, Reinhard Heydrich, was elected as head of Interpol by the European criminal police forces.

Peiper was assigned to the SS Main Office, Personal Staff, Reichsführer SS. Himmler's Main Adjutant Office had the character of a senior-level administrative unit in 1936 and was designated the Personal Staff, Reichsführer SS. In 1939, it was officially elevated in status to a SS Main Office. On 9 November 1936, Himmler ordered:

- 1) In consideration of its size and the expansion of its duties during the year, the Main Adjutant Office of the Reichsführer SS will be designated Personal Staff of the Reichsführer SS effective 9 November 1936.
- 2) I appoint SS-Brigadeführer Wolff to be Chief of the Personal Staff.
  - 3) The Adjutant's Office of the Reichsführer SS will be reorga-

nized to form a department within the Personal Staff. 6

At this time the other main offices subordinate to the Reichsführer SS were the SS Main Office, the SD Main Office, the Main Office for Race and Settlement, the Main Office for SS Personnel, Main Legal Office, and the Main Security Police Office. In time, other main offices were added to the list until there was a total of twelve.

The head of Peiper's main office was Karl Wolff, at that time SS-Gruppenführer. Wolff was born on 13 May 1900 as the son of a magistrate in Darmstadt and, at the age of 18, was a Leutnant in the Grand Duke of Hessia's Life Guard Infantry Regiment 115. He had been decorated with both Iron Crosses. After the war, he completed a course in banking in Frankfurt, worked during the summer of 1924 in a Munich advertising agency and rapidly mastered the business to such an extent that in a few months he became branch chief. In the summer of 1925 he became self-sufficient with his own agency. In 1931 he entered the SS. Starting in February 1932, he was an SS-Sturmführer until he became the adjutant of General (a.D.) Ritter von Epp, Bavaria's Prime Minister and Governor, a very popular man in Munich. In June 1933 Himmler took Wolff onto his staff as adjutant, where he became a senior adjutant in April 1934 and Chief Adjutant and SS-Brigadeführer on 9 November 1935. One year later Wolff took over the position of Chief of the Personal Staff Reichsführer SS (RFSS), and he was officially designated as Chief of a Main Office after 8 June 1939.7

The conciliatory Wolff was a man of compromise and was considered to be Himmler's right-hand man and his closest confidant. As head of the Personal Staff RFSS, he had additional supervisory powers over the Adjutants Office and Chancellery of the Reichsführer. SS-Oberfuhrer Ludolf von Alvensleben was Himmler's Chief Adjutant and Peiper's immediate superior at that time. The 37-year-old nobleman and owner of a country manor was born in Halle on the Saale as the son of a Prussian General. He had previously been the Adjutant of the Reich Sport Leader. During the war, he became the Chief SS and Police Commander with Army Group A and, in February 1944, held the same position for the Elbe River District.

The Senior Adjutant of the Reichsführer SS was SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Hajo Freiherr von Hadeln, who initiated Peiper into his new duties in July 1938. Von Hadeln was from Berlin and the son of a Prussian Guards Officer. He was only five years older than Peiper. From 1929 to 1930 he studied law and art history at the University of Munich. His studies were interrupted for some time after his father's death when he had to take care of his mother and brothers, but he resumed his studies in Berlin in 1932. He graduated as a Doctor of Philosophy in February 1935. He had been a member of the SA since December 1930 and had joined the SS on 1 January 1932. He became an SS-Scharführer on 13 October 1932 in the 1. (Cottbuser) Sturm of the 27. SS-Standarte and commanded a Sturm composed of university students after November 1932. After his graduation, he attended the same SS Officer Cadet Course in Jüterbog as Peiper and attended the SS Officer Candidate Course at Bad Tölz from April 1935 to January 1936. After he became an SS-Untersturmführer on 20 April 1936 he served as a platoon leader in the 1. SS-Totenkopf-Standarte "Oberbayern". By 12 June 1936 he had already been transferred to the Main Adjutant Office Reichsführer SS, where he later became Himmler's adjutant.8

Because of their origins and their training, their high standards and their mental abilities, such gifted men as Peiper and Dr. von Hadeln were virtually predestined to attract Himmler's notice. Jochen Peiper's office was located in the building of the former Arts and Crafts School at Prinz-Albrecht-Straß 8 in Berlin, where the Reichsführer SS had established his offices since 1934. There, in the immediate vicinity of the government quarter, were numerous other SS offices, including the Main Office of the SS in the Hotel Prinz Albrecht and the SD Main Office at Wilhelm-Straße 101, 103/4, and 106, to name a few.

Among other things, Peiper's duties as adjutant required the ability to get along with a wide variety of people, organizational talent, and an adroit and assured manner. He inspected and sorted the arriving mail, answered questions of minor importance and presented those letters to Himmler which required his personal attention. He maintained Himmler's appointment and conference schedule, received petitioners, sent out congratulations and, in short, carried out all the usual duties of an adjutant of a major official in the period before the war. He possessed no authority to make decisions or to issue orders.

He also became acquainted with operations which existed in the Personal Staff, Reichsführer SS, such as the Nordland-Verlag (Nordland Publishing), the Allach Porcelain Factory, the Bauer Photo Company, Anton Loibl Ltd., the SS Savings Cooperative, Inc., the Society for the Advancement and Preservation of German Cultural Monuments, Inc., the Externsteine Endowment and the King Heinrich I Memorial Endowment.

The Allach Porcelain Factory produced the well-known Yule candlesticks which the Reichsführer SS gave to SS members along with a certificate. The possession of the Yule candlestick was entered in the personnel files, and Peiper also received one. Moreover, Allach produced Yule plates, commemorative candlesticks, and a variety of sculptures which Himmler presented as gifts and which were never commercially sold, in contrast to the dishes produced by the firm.

The King Heinrich I Memorial Endowment was concerned with research and the preservation of the cathedral in Quedlimburg, where the king had found his final resting place.

The Society for the Advancement and Preservation of German Cultural Monuments took care of the Sachsenhain at Verden on the Aller River and the Haithabu excavation site near Schleswig. In addition to the "Department for Cultural Research" and the "Excavation" Department, there were also several hundred scientists and university professors assembled in the Personal Staff Reichsführer SS, who participated in the research and teaching institute, "Ahnenerbe e.V. ("Genealogical Heritage, Inc."). The main objective was to preserve Germanic and Indo-Germanic heritage and present it in an interesting manner.

An additional office was the Lebensborn e.V. which is and has been described frequently in terms which are completely false. Those blessed with large families, but also single mothers, could give birth in Lebensborn homes in peace and quiet and under the best of care.

Also belonging to the staff were the Press Office and the SS Enlisted Billeting Office, which was responsible for the quartering of SS soldiers in courses. There were also a few additional offices, such as the main departments and sections. Finally, there was the "Freundeskreis Reichsführer SS" ("Friends of the

Reichsführer SS") which included industrialists, economists, financiers, bankers and others who provided substantial donations to support the work of the SS.

Peiper also became acquainted with the Wewelsburg, where Himmler wanted to establish a philosophical center for the SS. In 1933 he learned of the existence of the dilapidated castle near Büren. It had been mentioned in myth as the last refuge of the German knights from their enemies from the east and it was said that these knights would launch their battle of liberation from there. From 1935 on the Wewelsburg SS School belonged to the Personal Staff RFSS where, because of its special significance, it was given its own office.

A walled fort had existed on the site in prehistoric times before the castle was constructed more than 300 years before in a triangular shape. When Himmler first saw it in November 1933 he was immediately enthused and leased the entire area. Starting in 1934 the castle underwent considerable reconstruction; ultimately, it was supposed to contain a research institute for pre- and ancient history and for astronomic research (to include an observatory), as well as libraries, and other facilities. Until 1938, construction concentrated on the east wing. This included tearing down the north tower to the first floor roof and converting the ground floor to a hall for Gruppenführer, while the cellar was converted to a crypt, but its purpose is still shrouded in mystery. Among other properties, the Catholic parish church of the village of Wewelsburg was sold to the SS in July 1939, but services continued to be held there until April 1945. The castle contained artistically valuable furniture from local artisans.9

The Wewelsburg was conceived as a conference center for the highest ranking SS leaders.<sup>10</sup> Young scientists carried out a variety of independent research projects at the castle and also conducted archeological excavations in the vicinity. There were paleontologists, pre-historians, archeologists, historical researchers and draftsmen who contributed to the organization of the Wewelsburg as a center of SS philosophy. Starting in 1935, Dr. Hans des Coudres put together a scientific library with works on pre- and ancient history, as well as the history of religions, myths, churches, cultures, art and literature. It contained 16,000 volumes by 1938. There was also a museum. The Reichsführer had an office and living quarters in the castle and kept his weapons collection there.

In October 1935 SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Bernhard Frank was transferred to Wewelsburg as a scientific collaborator. He then ran the library in 1939. He had attended the Braunschweig Cadet School together with Peiper in 1935. He recalled that Peiper visited the castle in the company of the Reichsführer perhaps four or five times, during which Peiper and he conversed. He remembered that:

Peiper was an aristocrat in appearance and nature; he had no "von" in front of his name, but he was noble through and through.

He possessed a certain characteristic sarcasm when he didn't like something. A few people who didn't understand him naturally ran afoul of this. Basically, he was very human and could be very agreeable. It was only when he felt that the person he was talking to didn't care for him that he could be very sarcastic.

Frank received his degree in 1938 for work on the names of

Wewelsburg's land parcels.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Frank, who became commander of Obersalzberg in 1943, had the impression then that Peiper was doubtlessly already aware of the command role within the SS for which he was being groomed and for which he was entirely suited. Peiper's lifestyle was unpretentious; he still seemed to be somewhat shy, but on the other hand it was very obvious that he was a very gifted man intellectually.<sup>13</sup>

Although this brief sketch doesn't even begin to cover all the many tasks of the SS and its leader, Heinrich Himmler, it still covers some of the areas with which Jochen Peiper had to concern himself as Himmler's adjutant.

What were Peiper's daily duties at Prinz-Albrecht-Straße 8 like? This question is answered by Himmler's Adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Hajo Freiherr von Hadeln, who described the duties of the Adjutant's Office Reichsführer SS in 1938:

When the Head Adjutant's Office RFSS was reorganized as the Personal Staff RFSS, it was necessary to reorganize an Adjutant's Office for the RFSS. In the light of the experiences in the past year and a half, it seemed possible to clearly define the limits of its responsibilities in relation to other departments and offices and make suggestions for its final form.

With the exception of things that would be the responsibility of the Police Adjutant's Office of the Reichsführer SS, the Adjutant's Office of the RFSS included all other appropriate tasks, such as: personal and official assistance to and escort of the Reichsführer SS; the setting of appointments; invitations, cards and gifts; travel arrangements; maintaining official diaries, etc. It was discovered that in order to properly carry out the duties of the Adjutant's Office Reichsführer SS, a considerable amount of on-the-job training was necessary, in my opinion, which amounted to at least a half, if not an entire year of service with the Reichsführer SS as a prerequisite. I did not believe that it was possible to use adjutants on temporary duty to satisfactorily carry out the real duties of an adjutant, and for that reason suggested that the Adjutant of the Reichsführer SS and his deputy should each be assigned to the Personal Staff of the Reichsführer SS for about three years. And it might be suggested here that the official designation of 1st and 2nd Adjutant - instead of the present designation "assigned to adjutant duty" - would better correspond to the duties of the deputy adjutant. The 2nd Adjutant would automatically replace the 1st Adjutant when his tour of duty expired, and this would better ensure objective continuity in the activities of the Adjutant's Office Reichsführer SS than had previously been the case.

In line with the intention of the Reichsführer SS to give young SS leaders a glimpse at the overall scope of the tasks of the SS, it is respectfully recommended that adjutants (or orderly officers) be assigned duties in the Adjutant's Office as was previously done. Their tour of service would normally consist of a half year. The most able of the men assigned to adjutant duty could then have their tour extended annually as appropriate for an additional half year, and then after satisfactory service they would be transferred permanently to the staff. By adopting this scheme, the three-year period of service in the personal staff of the Reichsführer SS would consist of one year service in temporary duty status, one year as the second adjutant, and one year as the first adjutant. I propose the distribution of duties within the RFSS Adjutant's Office as follows:

Adjutant: overall responsibility for all adjutant services. In

particular, he would be responsible for setting appointments, maintaining the daily calendar of the Reichsführer SS, travel arrangements, personal and official assistance to and escort of the Reichsführer SS at all important events, managing the budget for the Adjutant's office and for official travel, dispatch of all correspondence of the Adjutant's Office of the RFSS, and screening individuals requesting a consultation with the Reichsführer SS for the first time.

The 2nd Adjutant is the 1st Adjutant's primary representative for all of the above responsibilities. In particular, he is responsible for: maintaining the official diary of the Reichsführer SS, preparing his cards and gifts, prescreening individuals who wish to speak with SS-Gruppenführer Wolff, responding to invitations for SS-Gruppenführer Wolff, supervision of files and records.

Officer temporarily assigned to adjutant duties: general support of the other two adjutants, answering the screening telephone, delivery of gifts from the Reichsführer, maintenance of the visitor book.

Secretary: overall responsibility for all written materials, preparation of birthday lists, travel accounts, appointment reminders, Reichsführer SS gift file, storage of classified materials, visit and inspection lists.

The Assistant Clerk: general assistance to the secretary, turning down invitations for the Reichsführer SS and for SS-Gruppenführer Wolff, supervision of the visit and invitation files, general filing, letters accompanying birthday presents.

In this connection, clarification is requested as to whether protocol duties should also be the responsibility of the Adjutants Office for the time being and whether a central ticket distribution center for the entire SS and for special occasions – such as the Reich Party Day and 9 November – is planned in Berlin.

If this is planned, then it is respectfully suggested that that these two tasks should be carried out by an SS officer in the Adjutant's Office specifically assigned to them, as they would appear to be closely related.

Finally, due to the fact that the Main Police Adjutant's Office is designated as a main office, in which both the adjutant and his deputy have full signature authority – regardless of the personnel assigned to the positions – a decision is respectfully requested how the SS Adjutant's Office is to be treated in this regard. 14

Although the original copy of these recommendations was not marked up with the margin notes that were typical of Himmler, they apply sufficiently to Peiper's duties and responsibilities.<sup>15</sup> According to these guidelines, Peiper was brought into the Main Adjutant's Office within the Personal Staff RFSS starting in June 1938 and, after a period of familiarization, later performed duties as the 2nd Adjutant. He often accompanied Himmler on his travels. In September 1938 Peiper participated as a part of Himmler's entourage in the Reich Party Day at Nuremberg (theme: "Großdeutschland"), where he had first met Himmler four years earlier. On 29 September 1938 the Four-Power Conference took place in Munich, where peace was preserved and the decision made to return the Sudetenland to Germany. Himmler attended the meeting with Wolff. That same month Peiper accompanied Himmler to Stuttgart, where he spoke to Germans from abroad.16

In October 1938 units of the Wehrmacht, among them the Leibstandarte, moved into the Sudetenland, now a part of Germany. On 22 May 1939 Jochen Peiper was awarded the medal in commemoration of 1 October 1938.17 On 19 October 1938 Himmler informed the Leibstandarte that he had extended Peiper's assignment for three additional months. 18 On 8 November 1938 Himmler was spending time in Munich due to a conference of SS-Gruppenführer at the officers "mess of the Deutschland" Regiment. That afternoon the German Embassy Councilor Ernst vom Rath died from the bullets of the Jewish assassin Grynszpan in Paris. Himmler had wanted to give the oath to the recruits of the Verfügungstruppe at the Munich Feldherrnhalle at midnight, and SS-Gruppenführer Wolff was sitting in the Munich restaurant "Four Seasons" with Heydrich. They were informed there by telephone from Berlin by the Head of the Gestapo, Müller, that Jewish shops were being destroyed and homes plundered within the Reich.

Wolff immediately went to Himmler who was at Hitler's private residence in the Prinzregentenplatz and informed both of these events. They were obviously surprised and gave clear expression to their indignation at these proceedings. It was to Himmler's credit that he kept the SS out of the events of the Reichskristallnacht ("Crystal Night"), which were as deeply repugnant to him as were they to any normal thinking man. In a file note, Himmler criticized these "empty headed acts" and SS-Gruppenführer Wolff assigned responsibility to the Party in a long memorandum.<sup>19</sup>

Himmler then traveled to Italy for five weeks of vacation. How clearly he was opposed to this pogrom was also described in the testimony of Carl Burckhardt, League of Nations Commissioner for Danzig. When Goebbels declined to speak with the Swiss commissioner due to scheduling conflicts, Wolff invited him in Himmler's name. On 23 November 1938, he described Himmler's horror concerning the Reichskristallnacht to him and, in addition, said, "The internal situation in this country has become unbearable, and something has to happen. The responsible party is Herr Goebbels, who exercises an intolerable influence on the Führer. That can't continue, something must be done!"<sup>20</sup>

In the middle of January 1939 Peiper was with Himmler at the Wewelsburg, and on 14 February 1939 he participated in the launching of the battleship "Bismarck" in the presence of Himmler and Hitler. On this occasion he met the adjutant of the Chief of Police for Bremen, SS-Hauptsturmführer Otto Dinse, who would later become Peiper's adjutant.<sup>21</sup>

In his first half year as a member of Himmler's staff Jochen Peiper had learned his duties well. The elegant, youthful-looking, and intelligent Berliner was highly regarded by Himmler. On the other hand, some outsiders perceived the young adjutant in the black uniform of an Untersturmführer as appearing rather stiff and cold to the point of arrogance, and he even gave this impression to Himmler's family.<sup>22</sup>

On 24 January 1939 the Reichsführer SS ordered "the assignment of SS-Untersturmführer Peiper ... to duties on the personal staff of the Reichsführer SS ... extended for an additional year." A few days later, on 30 January 1939, Peiper was promoted to SS-Obersturmführer, which was approved by the Leibstandarte, to which Peiper still belonged. It is perhaps surprising that Peiper's military career was not advanced by his activi-

ty as Himmler's adjutant. An investigation of the careers of his classmates from officer candidate school shows that some had already been promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer by January 1939 and even more had reached the rank of SS-Obersturmführer. Even Peiper's classmate von Hadeln was an SS-Hauptsturmführer by 9 November 1938.<sup>25</sup>

Peiper became acquainted with Sigurd Hinrichsen, a secretary on Himmler's staff, in the summer of 1938. The slender, blonde woman had been born on 16 August 1912 in Kiel, and was therefore almost three years older than Peiper. Her parents were the dentist, Kurt Hans Hinrichsen (born in Osche/West Prussia in 1877) and Frieda Horn (born in 1881 at Lübeck). Sigurd grew up in her parent's home in Kiel as the fourth child and baby of the family and spent a peaceful childhood there.26 Starting in 1919 she was a student at a girls' school, where she was graduated on 23 March 1929 with a diploma and then attended the Kiel School of Home Economics from Easter 1929 to the fall of 1930. In the period from April to October 1931 she learned stenography and typing and was then employed in her father's dental practice. From October 1933 to February 1934 she was an apprentice nurse in the Kiel Park Sanatorium in order to become acquainted with general care of the sick. Sigurd's mother died on 25 September 1935 in Bad Reichenhall after an accident, and her father died on 4 August 1937 from leukemia.

Presumably through the recommendation of Lina Heydrich, the wife of SS-Gruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the SD, Sigurd applied to the personal staff of the Reichsführer SS. Lina was the same age as Sigurd and had known her well in Kiel. Sigurd was accepted and starting in October 1936 worked as secretary on the personal staff of the Reichsführer SS.

She lived at Waitzstraße 5/III in Berlin/Charlottenburg.<sup>27</sup> Her brother Karl-Hans was an SS-Obersturmführer in the SD Main Office, and her other brother Rolf, a doctor, was in the Medical Sturm of the Allgemeine SS in Kiel as a SS-man.<sup>28</sup> He was also an Assistant Surgeon in the Naval Reserve. The 26-year-old Sigurd Hinrichsen was an attractive, athletic and plucky young lady with many interests. She had earned the trust and confidence of Himmler and was also quite close to him on a personal level. Sigurd Hinrichsen and Hedwig "Häschen" ("Bunny") Potthast were the only secretaries who were present at Himmler's birthday celebration on 7 October 1937 in Gmund. Both of them formed a friendship which lasted many years.

In the beginning she was somewhat hesitant at the attempts of her boss' adjutant to date her, possibly because he was also – as was obvious – exactly three years younger than she was.<sup>29</sup> However, the two young people were soon close and decided to build their future together. In March 1939 Peiper submitted his request to Himmler for permission to marry her. Among others, SS-Obersturmbannführer Professor Diebitsch stood as a witness for Peiper's future wife. Diebitsch was in charge of the artists who worked for the SS Porcelain Manufacturing Plant at Allach as well as being a coat-of-arms expert. After a few days, on 11 March 1939, Peiper received a positive response from von Alvensleben which said, "Approval has been recommended for the forthcoming marriage – as an exception to policy for time – as both participants are very well known to the Reichsführer and the Reichsführer has approved the application".<sup>30</sup>

On 17 April 1939 approval was issued for the engagement and

marriage and, on 29 June 1939, Jochen Peiper and Sigurd Hinrichsen were married in Berlin. The ceremony took place at Margarethen Straße 11.31 Soon after the young pair moved into their own place at Rüdesheimer Platz 7 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. The large corner house belonged to Valerie von Landau from Vienna.32 By this time Peiper had already been advanced to the position of 1st Adjutant of the Reichsführer SS, as he had signed a letter on 1 June using this title.33 He was officially named to this position effective 1 November 1939.34

On 15 March 1939 the Czech Republic was entrusted to Germany as a protectorate by Minister President Hacha. Poland and Hungary had already occupied parts of the country and Slovakia had declared itself an independent state. As a result, the situation was similar to that which had previously lasted for almost 1000 years until 1918. Peiper accompanied Himmler when German troops marched into Prague. In 1940 he was awarded the Prague Castle Clasp to the commemorative medal for 1 October 1938. On 22 March 1939 Peiper accompanied Himmler on a trip to Memel, which was returned to Germany on that day after years of foreign administration by Lithuania. Peiper later received the commemorative medal for the recovery of the Memel.

On 19 April 1939 in the Reich Chancellery's Mosaic Hall, Hitler received the newly promoted SS-Untersturmführer graduates from the Braunschweig Officer Candidate School. Himmler and Wolff were present. On 20 April 1939 Hitler celebrated his 50th birthday, to which the Wehrmacht honored him by a large parade – the largest up to that point in time – by all branches of the service along the Ost-West-Achse in Berlin. Late in the afternoon Himmler and Wolff took part in a tea reception for the Head of the Reich at the Reich Chancellery.

At this time there occurred something which seems basically meaningless today, and which must also have appeared that way to Peiper at the time – his membership in the Nazi Party. Soldiers of the SS-Verfügungstruppe were under no circumstances required to be party members, and Peiper had not applied for membership, either while in the Allgemeine SS or in the SS-Verfügungstruppe. This must have caught someone's eyes who was looking at Peiper's personnel file. As a result, on 27 April 1939 in Berlin, a letter was sent from Reichsamtleiter Opdenhoff (on the Staff of the Deputy Führer) to the Reichsschatzmeister (Treasurer) of the NSDAP, to the effect that;

SS-Hauptsturmführer Peiper (author: he was an Obersturmführer at the time) is adjutant for the Reichsführer SS. According to the Leibstandarte, Peiper has been proposed for party membership twice, but the applications have somehow been lost and the preparing office let a reminder slip. Naturally, the Reichsführer SS considers that a man such as Haupsturmführer Peiper, who works in such close contact with him, should be a party member.



Jochen Peiper as an 18-year-old schoolboy.



SS-Hauptscharführer Gustav Lombard was the leader of Peiper's section in the 1. Sturm of the 7. SS-Reiter-Standarte in the fall of 1933. He received the Knight's Cross as a regimental commander in the SS-Kavallerie-Division "Florian Geyer" in 1943 and ultimately became a SS-Brigadeführer and Generalmajor der Waffen-SS.



In 1935 Rudi Lehmann commanded Peiper's squad in the cadet course at Jüterbog. At that time an SS-Unterscharführer. He later became the Operations Officer for the Leibstandarte and ended the war as a SS-Standartenführer and commander of the 2. SS-Panzer Division "Das Reich". He was awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross.



Starting in 1935 Welfen Castle in Braunschweig housed the the SS-Officer Candidate School (Junkerschule). In the spring of 1935, Peiper was graduated from the course.



Horst Peiper (fifth from the right) with the 12. Kompanie of SS-Regiment "Germania" during the Reich Farmers' Day at Goslar in 1935.



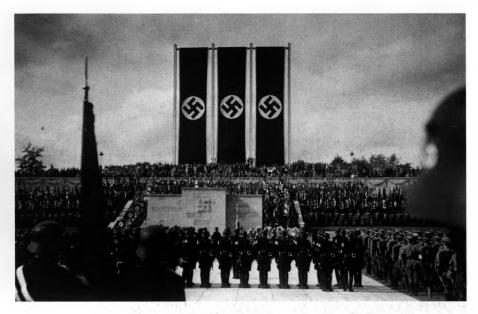
SS-Rottenführer Paul Albert Kausch was Peiper's training officer at Jüterbog in 1935.



Ultimately he became a SS-Standartenführer and the commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment "Hermann von Salza". He was awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross.



Starting in 1936, Peiper served with SS-Unterscharführer Paul Guhl in the 11. Kompanie. He received the Knight's Cross in 1944.



Elements of the SS-Verfügungstruppe at the Reich Party Day in 1936.



Jochen Peiper soon after 9 November 1935, when he had been promoted to SS-Standartenjunker.



SS-Untersturmführer Peiper (left) with men of the 11./LAH at the Reich Party Day in September 1936 in Nuremberg. Ernst Klünder is sitting second from the left; next to him is Paul Guhl.



Guard detail from the 11./LAH in formation at the Reich Chancellery.



The 11. Kompanie formed up in the interior courtyard at the Reich Chancellery.



Guard mount of the 11./LAH in the Court of Honor (Ehrenhof) at the Reich Chancellery.



Court of Honor at the Reich Chancellery at night.



Men of the 11. Kompanie of the Leibstandarte during the 1935 Reich Party Day in Nuremberg.



Training on the parade field at Berlin Lichterfelde.

NCO soccer team of the 11./LAH in 1936 at Berlin-Lichterfelde. From the left: Alois Hartung (Company commander in 1944 in the Hitler-Jugend-Division; awarded the German Cross in Gold), Georg Gradl, Hermann Binneweis, Herbert Michel, Erich Reinhold, Ernst Klünder, Gerhard Julius, Willi Hildebrand, Karl Hollander, Paul Guhl (1944: Sturmbannführer, Knight's Cross) and Willi Schweitzer (1945: Sturmbannführer, Knight's Cross).





Men of the 11./LAH in Berlin-Tempelhof.



The young SS-Untersturmführer Jochen Peiper in the spring of 1936 while serving with the 11./LAH.



Peiper at the swimming pool at the barracks at Licherfelde.



Men of the 11. Kompanie of the Leibstandarte in their parade-dress uniform, featuring white shirts and web gear.







Otto Hollander and his brother Karl Hollander, who served in the 11./LAH with Peiper.



Vienna during the reunification of Austria with Germany on 20 March 1938. (The sign reads, "Dancing this evening ... The Leibstandarte is happy to invite all young women".).



Reich Party Day 1938: the 11./LAH takes a break before parade rehearsal.



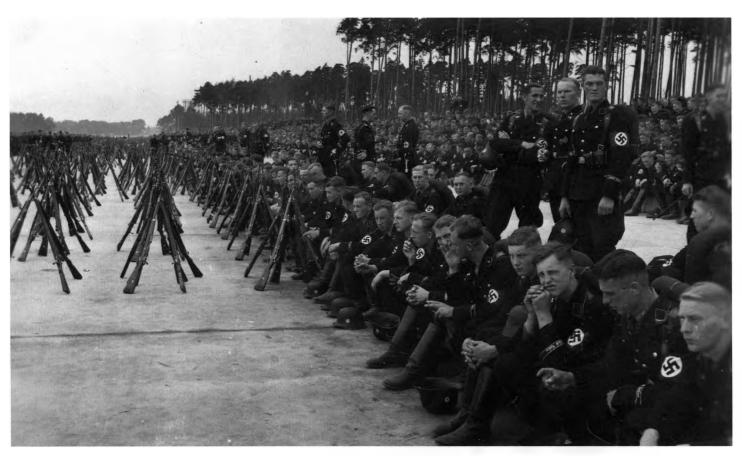
The 11./LAH at the Reich Party Day in 1938. Standing, from the left: Paul Mischke, Felix Peitsch, Franz Konys and SS-Oberscharführer Karl Hollander. Sitting: Paul Augustin (who was KIA in 1943 as a photo journalist. A number of his photos of Peiper's SPW-Bataillon are reproduced in the book.), Franz Schwab, Heinz Schwulera, Walter Neumann, Friedrich Ringel.



Guard duty in front of the Reich Chancellery.



Changing of the guard at the Reich Chancellery (Voßstraße entrance).



The 11. Kompanie during the Reich Party Day.



Jochen Peiper's brother, SS-Untersturmführer Horst Peiper (left), in the spring of 1937 while serving in the 2. Hunderschaft of the 1. SS-Totenkopf-Standarte "Oberbayern".



The 11./LAH in the Court of Honor at the Reich Chancellery.



In the spring of 1938 Peiper became the adjutant of the commander of the III./LAH, SS-Obersturmbannführer August-Wilhelm Trabandt. Trabandt received the Knight's Cross as the commander of the SS-Infanterie-Brigade 1 in 1944. He ended the war as a SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS.



One of Peiper's friends in the Leibstandarte in the years before the war, SS-Obersturmführer Karl-Heinz Brohl. Brohl was the commander of the 4. (MG)/LAH. He was KIA at Arras (France) on 21 May 1940 while commanding the 3./SS-Artillerie-Regiment of the "Totenkopf"-Division.



The 11./LAH in October 1938 during the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany. The banner over the church entrance says, "God protect our Führer!" Paul Guhl is third from the right.



In July 1938, Jochen Peiper was assigned to the staff of the Reichführer SS.

October 1938 in Rome on Italian Police Day. Himmler, Dr. Eugen Dollmann, Karl Wolf, the Italian Police Chief Arturo Bocchini, Dr. Hajo von Hadeln and the Minister of Education Bottai.



Jochen Peiper in 1939.



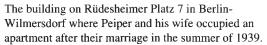
Jochen Peiper as SS-Obersturmführer and 2nd Adjutant of the Reichsführer SS in January 1939.

Peiper (2nd from the left), Keitel, Himmler, Bormann and Hitler.





Peiper's wife Sigurd worked as a secretary on Himmler's staff. She is seen here in a photograph from 29 January 1937 during the marriage reception for SS-Obersturmbannführer Richard Pruchtnow of the SD Main Office. From the left: Lina Heydrich, Karl Wolff, Himmler, Sigurd Hinrichsen (Peiper), the newly married Pruchtows and SS-Gruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich.

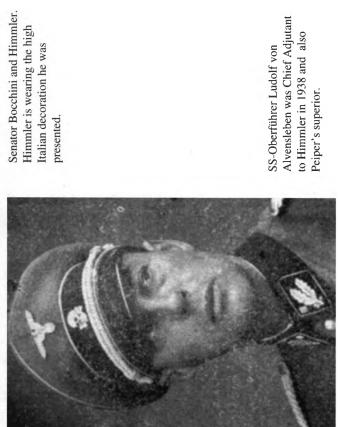




Rudolf Feddern, Jochen Peiper's orderly in the 11./LAH.



Senator Bocchini and Himmler. Himmler is wearing the high Italian decoration he was presented.



Himmler with Karl Wolff.

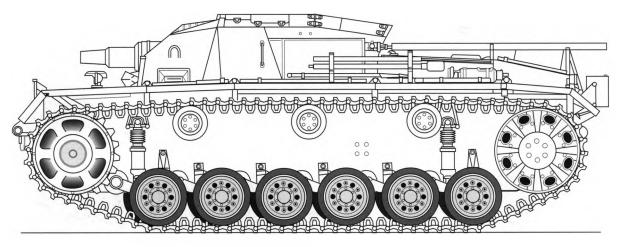






In May 1939, Hitler attended maneuvres at Munster. To the left of Hitler stands Himmler, to the right is SS-Brigadeführer Paul Hausser. Peiper can be seen on the far right.

Heinrich Himmler, Reichführer SS and Chief of the German Police, built up the SS starting in 1929.



Sturmgeschütz III, Ausf. B Courtesy of George Bradford

The reply asserted that Peiper was entered into the party effective 1 March 1938. For unknown reasons, it appears he had never been issued a membership card. Although Peiper was to be found in Reich files under member number 5508134, it is doubtful whether he had ever been really accepted into the party. In all the personnel forms and applications and other documents he filled out before and during the war, he always drew a line through the item indicating party membership. In his SS roster, his SS personnel file and in all the SS seniority lists from 1938 to 1 October 1944, he is listed as not belonging to the party.<sup>36</sup>

From 13 to 19 May 1939 Peiper traveled with Himmler, Wolff and Hitler on an inspection trip to the West Wall, which ran from the Eifel Mountains to the Swiss border. From there they traveled with Hitler to the Munster Troop Training Area, where they observed maneuvers by SS-Regiment "Deutschland". Steiner's regiment accomplished its mission in an impressive manner in the presence of numerous generals of the German army. The exercise - breaking into a fortified infantry position - was carried out using infiltration tactics under live fire and succeeded admirably. During the spring of 1939 Peiper and Himmler made a tour of every SS and police unit, as Himmler wished to see every man of the SS at least once. In May 1939 Peiper participated in Hitler's and Himmler's visit to Italy. During the trip he received an Italian decoration; at that level, such awards were obligatory.<sup>37</sup> On 26 August 1939 Peiper was transferred to the garrison unit of the Leibstandarte, the small section of the regiment which had not been effected by mobilization and remained in Berlin.38 He received a new dog tag: "7.-Nachkdo.LSSAH" ("Company -Garrison Unit LSSAH").39

The fateful war began for Germany on 1 September 1939. On 3 September 1939 SS-Gruppenführer Wolff was ordered to the Reich Chancellery as liaison officer for the Reichsführer SS and from that day on participated in the Polish campaign in the special train used by Hitler as the Führer Headquarters. At the beginning of the war Peiper did not return to the Leibstandarte as has been erroneously reported in various publications, but remained with Himmler as his 1st Adjutant. Together with Himmler he went to "Heinrich", a train which served the Reichsführer as his command center. Peiper was also at the Führer Headquarters in Hitler's special train for a short period during the Polish campaign. Among other things, he also took part in automobile trips behind the front. Hitler entered liberated Danzig on 19 September 1939 where Himmler also showed up, accompanied by Peiper.

After the end of the Polish campaign Peiper traveled with Himmler to Warsaw for an inspection trip by automobile.<sup>42</sup> With Himmler, he visited the SS-Kavallerie-Brigade in Litzmannstadt in October. Peiper's earlier superior, SS-Oberführer von Alvensleben, took over the German self-defense forces in the Bromberg area (Poland) during this period. It was at this spot that numerous ethnic Germans were killed by the Poles on the notorious "Bromberg Bloody Sunday".

When Himmler, Wolff and Peiper visited the Bromberg region, they witnessed the execution by firing squad of 12 to 15 Poles who had belonged to a partisan group which had been

located by the self-defense forces and had been sentenced by court martial. Himmler told Peiper it was regrettable but he considered "harsh measures" necessary.<sup>43</sup> The Poles had moved 50,000 ethnic Germans from their home villages and resettled them in the eastern part of Poland. Thousands were killed, thousands imprisoned; their homes and farms were plundered.

On 5 October 1939 Peiper flew with Himmler to Warsaw, where they attended the victory parade in the Ujazdowski Boulevard next to Hitler. On 7 October 1939, Himmler became the Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums (Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of German National Culture). SS-Oberführer Greifelt took over a newly established office for this purpose. On 23 December 1939 Peiper had an unexpected reunion with his regiment. Along with Hitler and Himmler, he attended the Christmas celebration of the Leibstandarte in the Bad Ems Casino. Along with songs and humorous skits, Peiper attended an informal dinner and a short address by the Führer to the regiment. Peiper was home with his wife in Berlin for Christmas. His brother Horst had also obtained leave, and so the brothers were able to get together with their parents. As SS-Obersturmführer, Horst had been in the Polish campaign with the SS-Heimwehr Danzig and had been awarded the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.

On 24 January 1940, Himmler met with Generaloberst von Brauchitsch and discussed abuses in Poland with regard to the executions of partisans. On Wolff's suggestion, the army turned over the reports it had prepared, which Himmler gave to the legal staff of the SS-Main Legal Office for investigation. The seven or eight remaining cases led to drastic punishment for those responsible.<sup>44</sup>

At the end of January 1940 Himmler headed for Przemysl with a large entourage. Along with Peiper and others, he took Wolff, SS-Brigadeführer Hanns Johst, and the expert on Tibet, SS-Sturmbannführer Dr. Ernst Schaefer, on the trip. During the train ride Peiper sat next to Schaefer on the occasion of his 25th birthday.<sup>45</sup> Himmler's purpose for the trip was to address the over 100,000 resettled Wolhynia Germans in Przemysl. In conjunction with the visit, they traveled through Krakow and then on back to Berlin. After Peiper's conviction the Americans totally exaggerated his involvement in this resettlement program. In response, he said, "Greifelt held all the strings, he was responsible. I never had anything to do with such things, since as a soldier I was forced into it, so to speak. I don't say this from fear, I only want to make it clear that I merely made appointments for Himmler". 46

On 13 March 1940 Himmler spoke in the Headquarters of Army Group A in Koblenz to army Generals (only army commanders and higher were invited). He talked about the activities of his organizations in Poland and indicated that self-defense forces and the police operated in accordance with martial law and, in this way, protected the army from the threat of partisan uprisings. Any known excesses had been investigated and the guilty severely punished. He himself was ready to take responsibility before the world. Peiper made another trip with Himmler to Breslau-Lissa, where Himmler inspected the SS-Infanterie-Geschütz-Ausbildungs-und Ersatzbataillon (SS-Infantry Howitzer Training and Replacement Bataillon).<sup>47</sup>

In March 1940 Himmler traveled with Peiper and Wolff to the Warthe District, where they inspected a newly formed Totenkopf Infantry Regiment. Then they continued on to Warsaw. In May 1940 they visited Lublin. They flew back to Berlin on 6 May.

Between these trips Peiper returned to his adjutant office at Prinz-Albrecht-Straße 8, where large piles of letters awaited his attention and replies. Along with the general inquiries, he also had to deal with many tedious proceedings. An example of this was the frequent requests from the Darmstadt book seller and antiquarian Buemming, who had brought Himmler a Romanesque processional cross and who recommended that he purchase it. As Himmler had no interest at all in it, Peiper wrote in June 1939: "... on behalf of the Reichsführer SS, I request you reclaim the "Romanesque Cross" you brought here at a mutually agreeable time, as the Reichsführer SS has no use for this very beautiful piece ... ".48 However, the industrious antiquarian didn't let up and subsequently offered Himmler through Peiper a signature by the German Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I.

Other inquiries were more the nature of personal requests, such as that of the wife of the architect Erdmann, who was expelled from the SS for marrying without obtaining prior approval. She asked Peiper to use his influence with Himmler to get her husband reinstated.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Peiper also had to deal with such significant questions as the one he received from the SS officer representatives in Rome. As they had not yet received the pistols with the appropriate holsters, they wanted clarification as to whether until such time as they got them, they could wear the "dagger with or without the buckled belt or just the belt with shoulder strap without anything, or, when all was said and done, with the dagger" with the graygreen uniform.<sup>50</sup> This, too, was part of Peiper's daily activity.

On 20 April 1940, Himmler awarded Peiper the Totenkopfring (Death's Head Ring) of the SS. On 9 May 1940 Wolff returned to the Führer Headquarters. The attack against France had started. The Reichsführer SS stationed his special train in Flammersfeld near Altenkirchen in the Westerwald and from there visited the western front by automobile. Peiper accompanied him. As there is an original report written by Himmler himself on this topic, we will include it here.

On Friday, 17 May 1940, we – Oberführer Prof. Dr. Gebhardt, Hauptsturmführer Dr. Stumpfegger, Hauptsturmführer Ruppmann, Obersturmführer Peiper, with drivers SS-Obersturmführer Lucas and SS-Obersturmführer Bastians – drove first to Aachen. At Siegburg we met Gruppenführer Wolff. Right at the start, we lost Bastians' vehicle because of his driving skill.

On the Autobahn we drove on to Cologne, where we ate our noon meal; and from Cologne on to Aachen. There we met Oberführer Zenner and waited for Bastian's vehicle to arrive. From Aachen, we drove through Dutch territory to Maastricht at around 1800. This part of Holland and Maastricht itself make a considerably friendly and tidy impression. The people were in no way unfriendly; on the contrary, they greeted our soldiers. When we needed directions, they were given in the most helpful and irreproachable manner.

From Maastricht, we drove across the Dutch/Belgian border to Hasselt. The Belgian roads are not bad, but the Dutch ones are of higher quality. While still on the road between Bilzen and Hasselt, we met elements of the Standarte "Der Führer" which, for the most part, had gone into the villages on both sides of the road for a rest. I greeted the men of the different companies and battalions.

In Hasselt I met Standartenführer Keppler, the commander of the Standarte "Der Führer", and had him brief me about the route followed by the Standarte so far and the fighting that they had seen and show me on the map. He then handed me a written report of the activities of the Standarte up to that point. We quartered ourselves in a hotel called the "Warson". We ate in the Gasthaus "den drei Pistolen" (Three Pistols). Standartenführer Keppler, whom I promoted that evening to Oberführer, sat on my left and Sturmbannführer Erspenmüller sat at my right. We ate very well that evening, drank a little wine, and the two talked of their battle experiences. Wolff and I discussed the fighting with Erspenmüller. Gruppenführer Wolff had gone into the SS because of Erspenmüller. He went to the Braunes Haus ("Brown House" - NSDAP headquarters in Munich) to join the SA. Erspenmüller was at the door and told him that since he had the size and the appearance, he should come to the SS social. Then Erspenmüller reminded me that whenever I left, he and Aumeier had always undertaken trips for the SS in my Dixi ... We then went back to our quarters. Our host sat up for the entire night with Kiermeier, as he was afraid that French fliers would blow up his house ...

The next day I met with Keppler and Erspenmüller once again, said goodbye to Jochen Peiper, who was to wait for the Leibstandarte there, and then we left Hasselt on a very fine road to Eindhoven and Tilburg ... <sup>51</sup>

On 20 May 1940, Himmler reached Führer Headquarters "Felsennest" ("Cliff Nest"), where he reported to Hitler and then returned to his special train.

#### The Campaign in France: 18 May to 21 June 1940

In Belgium, on 18 May 1940, Jochen Peiper returned to the Leibstandarte which was in the Bilzen area and joined his former 11. Kompanie there. After a short rest the Leibstandarte – attached to the 20. Infanterie-Division (mot.) – resumed its march on 20 May 1940 through Huy to Barveaux.

At first SS-Obersturmführer Peiper was a platoon leader in the 11. Kompanie. The company runner Heinz Motz recalled:

"He took over the 1. Zug from Otto Pinter, and I remember Peiper climbing into Gunter Hüttig's G3A (author: Krupp Vehicle). The platoon leader rode the G3A, which also carried the runners and the 5 cm mortar".

When SS-Hauptsturmführer Marks was injured a few days later in a car accident, Peiper took over the company.<sup>2</sup> His platoon leaders were SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Wald and Paul Guhl, SS-Sturmscharführer Erich Wendt, SS-Scharführer Karl Sönnichsen (the heavy machine gun group) and SS-Oberscharführer Willi Schweitzer (company headquarters personnel), who received the Knight's Cross in 1945.

On 22 May 1940 the regiment moved to Le Quesnoy, where

it was given the mission of preventing any attempt to breakout to Valenciennes. Peiper's 11. Kompanie was positioned within the III. Bataillon in the La Rhonelle Sector on both sides of Villerau. On 24 May the regiment was in the Eperleques area. Panzergruppe von Kleist had already broken through to the channel coast at Boulogne and, together with Heeresgruppe B, had surrounded the Allies. The Leibstandarte was attached to the 1. Panzer-Division on 25 May 1940 and received orders to take Watten and to position itself defensively along the line St. Momelin – Holque. On 25 May, in spite of the order to halt, Sepp Dietrich ordered the 72-meter high Wattenberg, east of Watten, to be taken, as it was of great significance for the defense of the Aa Canal and for the future attack across the canal.

The III. Bataillon was given this mission and, after artillery preparation, the 11. Kompanie attacked on the left and the 10th Kompanie on the right. Against heavy resistance, the 11. Kompanie and part of the 10. Kompanie crossed the canal by improvised means, while a platoon of the 10. Kompanie pushed across an intact railroad bridge, but bogged down in fire from Watten-South. Peiper displaced the enemy from Watten and then threw his unit against the Wattenberg. By 1945 hours, both companies had managed to successfully storm the hill. Sepp Dietrich arrived on the Wattenberg shortly thereafter, where he met with General Guderian, commanding general of the XIX. Panzer-Korps. Guderian asked Dietrich why he had allowed the hill to be stormed contrary to the orders to halt. Dietrich replied that any maneuver could be detected early by the enemy on the Wattenberg. Guderian approved this decision and brought up the 2. Panzer-Division.3

On 26 May 1940 an enemy attack on the Wattenberg was repulsed. On 27 May the LAH attacked across the Aa Canal to the east with the III. Bataillon breaking the resistance on the banks west of Ledringham. By evening it was on both sides of the fork in the road at La Cloche. On the following day the III./LAH was relieved by the II. Bataillon, which had run into heavy fighting with the English in Wormhoudt. For his actions at the storming of the Wattenberg Jochen Peiper was decorated with the Iron Cross, 2nd Class on 31 May 1940. He was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer and given official command of the 11. Kompanie.<sup>4</sup>

On 1 June 1940 the Leibstandarte moved to the banks of the coast to Cap Blanc Nez and Cap Gris Nez, west of Calais. It was there that Peiper's battalion commander, Trabandt, proposed the use of the "Dietrich" ("Skeleton Key") as the regimental tactical insignia. To support his proposal, he mentioned the fact that the III. Bataillon was the regiment's key to open the Prosna sector in Poland and the Ijssel Position at Zutphan. The name of the regimental commander certainly played a role as well. The insignia was adopted, and it was soon displayed on all the vehicles of the Leibstandarte. After 4 June 1940 the LAH moved through Cambrai, Hattencourt and Le Transloy. On 9 and 10 June the III./LAH had to remain inactive under the command of the 1. Gebirgsdivision along the route of advance.

On 10 June 1940 the III. Bataillon received orders to attack. Because the route of advance was clogged by the Gebirgsjäger, the III. Bataillon – with Peiper's company in the

lead – detoured from the N 37 south of Rocour-St. Martin onto side roads and crossed into the attack sector of the 83. Infanterie-Division, which was fighting with the enemy outside of Torcy-Belleau. Peiper had his company immediately dismount, spread out and deploy. Because of enemy artillery fire, there was a dangerous blockage and bunching of friendly troops on the approach route. Undisturbed, Peiper attacked with his company and was able to push the enemy back to Torcy. By evening the III./LAH was in Monthiers and on 12 June moved to Etrépilly, where it was quiet. SS-Hauptsturmführer Peiper had become a good and reliable company commander for the 11. Kompanie. On 13 June 1940 he was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, in Villers Cotteres.<sup>5</sup>

On 14 June 1940 German troops marched into Paris. After receiving this news Peiper's men rang the church bells in Etrépilly. On this day SS-Hauptsturmführer Marks took over command of the III./LAH. On 16 June the LAH moved into the Provins area and, on the following day, to St. Amand, where it was attached to the 9. Panzer-Division on 18 June. On 19 June the III./LAH launched an attack on St. Pourcain, where Kurt Meyer was able to advance with his motorcycle troops but was unable to prevent the demolition of the Sioule Bridge. At the same time Peiper advanced to the south, found an intact bridge some 12 kilometers south of St. Pourcain and took an entire French company prisoner.6 On the next day he and his company stayed in Gannat as a reserve. On 21 June he left the 11. Kompanie. The Campaign in the West was over for him. It is not clear as to what extent a shrapnel wound in the back of the head - mentioned for the first time only five years later - was the real reason for this. We know that Peiper received no wound badge and that this wound was not mentioned in a number of documents from the years 1942 and 1943.7

On 25 June 1940 the armistice was signed between France and Germany. Peiper was content with his service in France. He had commanded his company with circumspection in the recent fighting and earned the respect of his men in action.<sup>8</sup> Along with the Iron Crosses, 1st and 2nd Class, he received the Infantry Assault Badge in Bronze on 3 October 1940. In addition, he received the SS-Dienstauszeichnung für vier Jahre (SS Service Badge for four years service) on 7 September 1940.<sup>9</sup> At home in Berlin there was a surprise awaiting Peiper. On 7 July 1940 his daughter Elke was born in Berlin.

# Return to the Staff of the Reichsführer SS: 21 June 1940 to 4 August 1941

On 21 June 1940 Peiper was transferred to the Leibstandarte garrison unit and resumed duties as Himmler's 1st Adjutant on 20 July 1940 after a period of leave. In August 1940 a new adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Grothmann, was ordered to the staff. Peiper knew him. In 1935 both men had attended the cadet course at Jüterbog and the officer candidate school at Braunschweig. Grothmann had been born in Frankfurt but had grown up in Königsberg. He was one year younger than Peiper. After the courses Grothmann had been transferred to SS-Regiment "Deutschland". Grothmann had led this regiment's 13. Kompanie (Infantry Howitzer) and had won the

Iron Cross, 1st Class in the Western Campaign on 19 June 1940. Grothmann didn't understand why he had been ordered to serve on the Staff of the Reichführer.

I was ordered to Himmler's Adjutant Office in August 1940. Until then I had been the company commander of the 13./SS-"Deutschland". At that time Peiper was the 1st Adjutant, and I was his deputy. After Peiper was ordered to field duty I became 1st Adjutant. Peiper had been in the same officer candidate course as I-1935-so he was my classmate. We worked together in the Adjutant Office as friends and comrades, without friction. <sup>2</sup>

Grothmann headed the Main Office of the SS Adjutant Office in the Personal Staff RFSS and remained 1st Adjutant of the Reichsführer SS until the end of the war. In 1944, when Himmler also became the commander of the Ersatzheer (Replacement Army) and was responsible for activating the Volks-Grenadier-Divisionen, his position was redesignated as Chief Adjutant of the Waffen-SS with the RFSS.

In July 1940 Peiper traveled with Himmler for three days in Burgundy. They traveled through this region, departing from Freiburg. A Germanic tribe had once established a significant kingdom in this area, something which Himmler knew well and which inspired him accordingly. Later, Léon Degrelle, the Wallonian leader and highly decorated commander of SS-Sturm-Brigade "Wallonien" (SS Assault Brigade "Wallonia"), would present the idea of a reconstitution of the Burgundian kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Shortly thereafter there was a four-day automobile trip through Luxemburg, the Lorraine, and the Alsace, which took Peiper and Himmler from Belfort to Metz.

There, in an impressive ceremony on 5 September 1940, the Reichsführer SS presented the Führer Standard to the Leibstandarte assembled within Fort Alvensleben. Himmler and Sepp Dietrich simultaneously reviewed the assembled battalions. Jochen Peiper was with them. This ceremony was shown in newsreels and mentioned in the press.

In September 1940 a Spanish police delegation under the command of the Conde de Mayalde, the Chief of the Security Police, visited Berlin. In the presence of Himmler and Peiper, it visited the Leibstandarte barracks and watched a unit of the Waffen-SS conduct a training exercise. It also visited the Reich Sports Field and a Female Labor Service Camp, as well as the Security Police Officer School and the Police Technical School.

On 17 October 1940 Peiper, Grothmann, and Wolff accompanied Himmler on a flight to Bordeaux, where they attended a parade of the "Totenkopf"-Division, stationed in southern France. Afterwards, Himmler gave an address to the assembled officers of the division in Dax. It is uncertain if Peiper was able to meet with his brother Horst, who was assigned to the division. On the following day they drove across the Spanish border at Irun in response to an invitation by the Spanish government. They toured San Sebastian, Burgos, and Barcelona, where they visited a camp for Falangist Youth. In Toledo they saw the Alcazar, which had played an important symbolic role in the Spanish Civil War. In the Escorial Himmler laid a wreath at the gravesite of José-Antonio Prima de Revera, the founder of the Falangists. In addition to attend-

ing a bull fight, the Spaniards showed the delegation the art collection in the Prado and the archeological excavations of the remains of Visigoths in Segovia. The Reichsführer SS was given a few of the excavated relics as a gift. Himmler, accompanied by Peiper and Wolff, was received by the chief of state, Franco, and Spain's minister of the interior. As a result of this occasion, Peiper was awarded a Spanish order. After five days they flew back to Berlin. On the same day Hitler met with Franco at Hendaye on the French border.

Himmler, Peiper and the entourage directly went from Spain to the celebrations for the first year anniversary of the General Government in Krakow on 26 October 1940. In November, Peiper flew with Himmler, Heydrich and Generalleutnant der Ordnungspolizei von Bomharf to Rome in order to attend the burial of the chief of the Italian police, Senator Arturo Bocchini.

In Hitler's presence, Peiper took part in the Christmans celebrations of the Leibstandarte in December 1940 in Metz. After that, Peiper was involved in a major resettlement operation. According to the treaties with Estonia and Latvia, the numerous ethnic Germans living there were to be brought back to Germany from the Baltic states. In December 1940 70,000 Germans arrived by ship. After that activity, the Wolhynia, Narew, and Galacian Germans were resettled from Soviet-occupied eastern Poland. Using only 480 men of Himmler's staff, the exact number of these ethnic Germans was determined and transport then organized for 130,000 people. The ethnic Germans had trekked to the border in temperatures reaching 30 degrees below zero, mainly in horse drawn vehicles. There, they were loaded onto German trains, which caused major problems with transportation capacity.

In January 1941 Himmler flew to Norway with Peiper and Grothmann, where they visited SS-Infanterie-Regiment 6 at Dramen at 30 degrees below zero. On 24 February 1941 Himmler ordered the formation of SS-Kampfgruppe "Nord", to which SS-Infanterie-Regiment 6 was also assigned. Himmler and his staff then continued their trip through Norway by airplane, seaplane and ship, and visited Kirkenes, Norway's Reichskomissar Terboven in Oslo, Bergen, Narvik (Altafjord) and General Dietl in his headquarters north of Narvik. On 30 January 1941 – Peiper's 26th birthday – Himmler swore in Norwegian volunteers in Oslo. At a dignified ceremony in a large hall in Oslo, in the presence of the Wehrmacht Commander for Norway, Generaloberst von Falkenhorst, along with the Norwegian privy councilors, Himmler stated:

After many generations, you are the first men of Norway who, by your own choice, have decided to follow your hearts and go to fight without being forced to do so by a foreign administration which is a vassal to the English. For the first time you stand in ranks along with your comrades, the men of the Hird (translator: Quisling's Bodyguards) and the SS-men from Germany. I accept your induction and I enroll you in the "Standarte Nordland". We accept you as comrades, as brothers in our ranks, in the ranks of a formation which, from its inception, has thought in Germanic terms and which has been organized in a Germanic manner.

On 20 March 1941 in Berlin, Peiper took part in the

"Construction and Planning for the East" exhibition with Himmler, Bormann, and Hess. During this period, SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Bernhard Frank visited Himmler in Berlin in an official capacity. In Himmler's vestibule, he met Peiper, whom he knew well. Both men were soon deep in conversation concerning the war situation and Germany's position. Peiper candidly told Frank that he considered Germany's military position in a critical light. Soberly and realistically, and by no means avoiding constructive and free-ranging criticism, the two young officers discussed the dangers threatening Germany. According to Peiper, the SS, especially the Waffen-SS, had to be more tightly organized. Frank then mentioned the Jesuits and their utility as examples for certain sections of the SS, which found Peiper in agreement. At this early point even before the outbreak of war with the Soviet Union -Peiper already demonstrated his clear understanding and sober evaluation of the situation.7

In May 1941 the Reichsführer SS traveled through the Balkans and visited the Leibstandarte in Tyrnavos (10 May). For Peiper this offered a possibility to find out more from his comrades concerning his unit's participation in the Greek campaign. On 21 May 1941 Himmler flew back to Oslo with Peiper where, after their reception at the airport by General der Flieger Kitzinger, Generalmajor Sodan, Admiral Feldbusch and the Norwegian privy councilors Quisling, Lie, and Riisnaes, they reviewed the honor guard of the Norwegian and German police and the Hird. Afterwards, they participated in the foundation of the Allgemeine SS in Norway. SS-Standartenführer Jonas Lie, who had participated in the Balkan campaign in April 1941 with the Leibstanarte as an SS-Hauptsturmführer, became the leader of the SS Norge.8

During a train ride in Norway Peiper had a conversation with a Norwegian conductor, who told him about his meager income and the resulting problems with his three sons. Peiper told him that it was possible to have the youngsters educated in Germany, which the conductor thought was a good idea. Peiper then organized the matter.<sup>9</sup>

On 22 May the Reichsführer and Peiper visited the Norwegian volunteers of the "Wiking" Division, which had been assembled at the Troop Training Area at Münsingen. That evening, together with the divisional commander, SS-Brigadeführer Steiner, SS-Gruppenführer Berger, SS-Gruppenführer Jüttner and SS-Standartenführer Lie, they had a dinner with the Norwegian volunteers. The meal closed with speeches by Steiner, Quisling, and Himmler. To finish the ceremony, the national anthems for both Norway and Germany were sung.

On 27 May 1941 Peiper's brother-in-law Dr. Rolf Hinrichsen, Naval Reserve Chief Assistant Surgeon, was killed when the "Bismarck" sank in the Atlantic. After basic training and several exercises in the navy from 1934 to 1939, he had entered the navy as a Naval Reserve Assistant Surgeon in October 1939 and sailed in that capacity on the heavy cruiser "Blücher" from December 1939 to April 1940. On 24 April 1940 he was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class. Starting 15 August 1940, he took part in the operations of the Battleship "Bismarck". He was posthumously promoted to Naval Reserve Chief Assistant Surgeon on 1 August 1941, with an effective

date from 1 May 1941.10

From 11 to 15 June 1941 Peiper participated in the only Gruppenführer conference held at the Wewelsburg. During this period Peiper received a hard blow. His brother Horst died on 11 June 1941. Peiper found out that he had taken his own life while he was with the "Totenkopf" Division in East Prussia. Why did he do it? Horst Peiper, just three years older than his brother, joined the 12./SS-Regiment "Germania" on 17 June 1935 and passed a cadet course in November 1935. Following that, on 1 April 1936, he was ordered to SS Officer Candidate School at Bad Tölz. After Tölz and the platoon leader's course he became an SS-Untersturmführer on 20 April 1937 and became platoon leader of the 2. Zug of the 2. Hundertschaft of 1. SS-Totenkopf-Standarte "Oberbayern".

In 1938 he was transferred to the 4. SS-Totenkopf-Standarte "Ostmark" and became its regimental adjutant. On 11 September 1938 he was promoted to SS-Obersturmführer. It is interesting that his brother Jochen, who had become an SS-Untersturmführer one year before him, was only promoted to Obersturmführer on 30 January 1939. In October 1938 Horst Peiper participated in the march into the Sudetenland, once again a part of Germany.

In the summer of 1939 he was transferred to the SS-Heimwehr Danzig, which consisted of five motorized rifle companies, two antitank companies and one infantry support gun company. He took part in the Polish campaign as leader of the 1. Zug in the 1. Kompanie, and he was awarded the Iron Cross, 2nd Class for his action in the destruction of a Polish armored train at Rheda.11 Horst Peiper fought at Dirschau, Oxhöfter Kämpe, Gdingen and elsewhere. After the campaign he was awarded the Honor Pin of the Heimwehr Danzig and the Danzig Cross, 2nd Class.<sup>12</sup> In October 1939 the Heimwehr Danzig was transferred to Dachau, deactivated, and incorporated into the SS-"Totenkopf" Division, which was being activated there. Horst and Jochen Peiper received leave for Christmas 1939, which they spent in Berlin. Soon thereafter Horst Peiper became SS-Hauptsturmführer and regimental adjutant of the 2. SS-Totenkopf-Infanterie-Regiment under SS-Standartenführer Bertling.

During the Western Campaign he was wounded on 21 May 1940 but stayed with the regiment. After France's surrender the regiment was transferred to the Avallon area in August 1940, with its staff at Cuzy near Tannay. Shortly afterwards there were rumors in the regimental staff that Peiper had contravened paragraph 175 of army regulations, which governed homosexuality. He was supposed to have been ordered to appear in front of his divisional commander, Eicke, who laid a pistol on the table in front of him, so that he could shoot himself.<sup>13</sup> Peiper didn't do it. On 21 August 1940 he was relieved as adjutant by SS-Obersturmführer Anton Berlin, and the regimental commander, Bertling, was also relieved.

The commander of the regimental radio unit, Alfred Roßdeutscher, who had been in constant, close contact with Peiper during the Western Campaign, wrote:

In my experience, Horst Peiper was an extremely proper person. He always appeared calm and relaxed; he had a very high level of education, and was never a slave driver during recruit training. I was very sorry about his death and the version of his death outlined above reinforced my antipathy against Eicke, whom I had disliked from the beginning. 14

Horst Peiper was transferred to the reconnaissance battalion and took command of the 1. Kompanie. While the division was in East Prussia, he was reported to have shot himself on 11 June 1941 at 1527 hours. It was Jochen Peiper's contention that his brother had been a witness to infractions against paragraph 175 and had been silenced as someone who knew the details. That his brother could have himself participated in paragraph 175 activities appeared unimaginable to Peiper and to his parents due to their knowledge of him. If there had actually been concrete charges against Horst Peiper, he would have been tried by a divisional court-martial or another instance. 15

The author has intensively researched the puzzling circumstances surrounding Peiper's death in an attempt to clear them up. Roßdeutscher considered the accusation of homosexuality to be "completely out of the question". 16 The Signals Commander of the 2. Regiment knew of rumors of possible offences on the part of Peiper. In the end, however, there is no conclusive proof.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise, the event remained unknown in the division.<sup>18</sup> Officially, Peiper "died in an accident", and this was the entry in his personnel file.19 After the event, the body was taken to Berlin and buried in the wooded Berlin-Dahlem Cemetery on 17 June 1941. The 20. Kompanie of the LAH Ceremonial Bataillon, led by Hauptsturmführer Kaschula, made up the honor guard. The company arrived at the ceremony in a funeral train and fired three volleys over the grave. Jochen Peiper was present.<sup>20</sup> Beforehand, the men of the Ceremonial Bataillon had been told that Peiper had died in an auto accident in East Prussia.21

Oddly enough, Horst Peiper's grave – section 17 K 1-3 – is a normal grave site, and he wasn't given the status of war dead with the associated right of a permanent marker. Once the usage rights expired the grave was leveled.<sup>22</sup> Equally odd is the fact that the division does not seem to have reported the loss to the Central Office for the Registration of War Dead, as there is no file available concerning Peiper's death.<sup>23</sup> For an officer dying in Germany, this is quite astounding. It is also strange that in the Verordnungsblatt (regulations circular) of the Waffen-SS for 15 January 1943, Horst Peiper was notified to receive his certificate and Medal in Commemoration of 1 October 1938, which was waiting for him to pick up in Breslau.<sup>24</sup>

This is yet another indication that his death had not been officially reported. His brother's death must have contributed to Jochen Peiper's well-known reserve. The event itself remained unknown to practically all the officers who had contact with Jochen Peiper. Jochen Peiper was affected deeply by the death of his favorite brother.

At the 11th hour on 22 June 1941 Germany made a preemptive attack on the Soviet Union to prevent a surprise attack by the Soviets. All of the preparations made in the previous years by Stalin's gigantic Soviet Union for a powerful offensive against Germany were almost complete. The Soviet's territorial demands had become ever more limitless. There were urgent reports which became increasingly frequent concerning the massing of powerful Soviet units behind its western bor-

der. An infrastructure was established for a war against Germany. Germany, under Adolf Hitler, decided to meet this severe threat to Europe, before the Soviet masses could be launched.

After the outbreak of war in the east Peiper requested Himmler transfer him back to the Leibstandarte. At first, however, he remained with Himmler's staff and, on 25 June 1941, traveled in the special train "Heinrich" with Himmler to East Prussia. They took up quarters on a lake near Angerburg, about an hour away from the Führer Wolfsschanze Headquarters at Rastenburg. There, Peiper, Grothmann, and Himmler worked in the train. Later Himmler had a barracks and bunker installation built, the field command position christened "Hochwald" ("High Timber").

They visited Grodno on 30 June 1941 and, on 5 July 1941, Himmler and Peiper inspected the SS-Kavalleriebrigade in Klausen (East Prussia). On 13 July Himmler spoke to men of SS-Kampfgruppe "Nord" in Stettin. That same month Peiper flew to Finland with SS-Gruppenführer Wolff to visit SS-Kampfgruppe "Nord". Rudolf von Ribbentrop recalls,

I met Jochen Peiper briefly when I was an Untersturmführer and platoon leader in the 1. Kompanie of Aufklärungs-Abteilung "Nord" in July 1941. Poorly equipped and trained, the so-called "Kampfgruppe Nord" had gone into fighting at Salla in Finland. It was not effective. That had nothing to do with the courage of the men, but rather with their too short training period and, to a certain extent, with the qualifications of their commanders. For this reason Gruppenführer Wolff showed up accompanied by Jochen Peiper in the forest wilderness at Salla, in order to get a better impression of conditions at Kampfgruppe Nord. Wolff, whom I knew, sent for me. It was probably to be able to report to my father at headquarters how things were going with me. He expressed himself as deeply concerned over conditions within Kampfgruppe Nord. <sup>25</sup>

Jochen Peiper remained on Himmler's staff during the following weeks – at least until 4 August 1941, which is proven by a file note from him to Grothmann written on that date. Under these lines, Peiper wrote that Grothmann was to inform a Hauptsturmführer that the correspondence had been received, "... since I'm in the field". <sup>26</sup> In the first days of August 1941 the Reichsführer SS said goodbye at a Berlin airfield to his adjutant Peiper, who was flying to the front in Russia. <sup>27</sup>

It is certain that there were good relations between Peiper and Himmler. Peiper probably didn't regard Himmler as much of a military leader, but respected him as a competent organizer, which he had demonstrated, among other things, by the formation of the Waffen-SS.<sup>28</sup> These good relations with Himmler were maintained during the following years and Peiper visited the Reichsführer occasionally at his field command position during the war.<sup>29</sup>

### Peiper on the Eastern Front: 4 August 1941 to 11 July 1942

After SS-Hauptsturmführer Peiper had reached the Leibstandarte in the Jelanez area in Russia, he was initially assigned to an officer's position on the divisional staff.<sup>1</sup> At this

time the Leibstandarte had just successfully concluded the fighting for the Uman Pocket. The division consisted of: four infantry battalions as well as a heavy battalion, with a light and heavy infantry gun company; a 5 cm antitank company; the Abteilung "Schönberger", which was made up of the assault-gun battery and the 4.7 cm self-propelled antitank company; the artillery regiment (two battalions); the engineer battalion; reconnaissance battalion; flak battalion; communications battalion; and, logistics elements. On the staff, Jochen Peiper was exposed to the leadership of the Leibstandarte in the immediate vicinity of its commander, Sepp Dietrich. The divisional adjutant was SS-Hauptsturmführer Max Wünsche; Ia (Operations Officer) Obersturmbannführer Keilhaus (SS-Hauptsturmführer Rudi Lehmann - Peiper's corporal in 1935 was in training for this position).2 Peiper's duties on the staff consisted of bringing reports to the units and maintaining liaison with higher and attached units. He was used as an orderly or liaison officer. SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz von Westernhagen was another officer assigned to the staff for special duties.

The Leibstandarte had been in action in the Soviet Union since 2 July 1941 and first went into battle at the breakthrough of the Stalin Line. It advanced to Kiev and, on 25 July 1941, swung south where it took part in the fighting to close the Uman Pocket. After that it continued its advance to the Black Sea. Peiper was at the establishment of the bridgehead over the Ingulez on 17 August 1941 and the attack on and capture of the Black Sea port of Cherson on 19 August. The LAH was pulled out of combat for rest and recuperation at Bobrinez for the period 21 August to 7 September 1941. On 9 September 1941 the Leibstandarte crossed the Dnieper and moved along the Sea of Asov to the east. After a fighting pursuit through the Nogai Steppes, and the attack on the entrance to the Crimea at Perekop, it fought in the Melitopol area.

On 4 October 1941 the commander of the III./LAH, SS-Sturmbannführer Weidenhaupt, hit a mine on a motorcycle and was wounded. SS-Hauptsturmführer Albert Frey immediately took command of the battalion and SS-Hauptsturmführer Peiper took over his former command, the 11. Kompanie.<sup>3</sup> This 11./LAH, however, was not the same company in which Peiper had served before the war and which he had led in France in 1940. After the campaign in France in the fall of 1940, a new heavy company was formed in each battalion of the Leibstandarte, so that the company numbers had changed. Peiper's old 11. Kompanie, however, had been dissolved and, along with its former commander, Marks, was sent to Lauenberg as cadre for the establishment of the first SS NCO Academy. To replace this company the 18. Kompanie of the IV. (Wach-) Bataillon of the Leibstandarte was converted to a field unit, which, in turn, became the new 13./LAH. A few men from Peiper's dissolved 11./LAH were transferred to this new 13./LAH. Peiper's new 11. Kompanie in October 1941 was the former 9./LAH.

His platoon leaders were SS-Obersturmführer Otto Pinter, SS-Untersturmführer Herbert Fasching and SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Meier.<sup>4</sup> Pinter had formerly been a member of the dissolved 11./LAH and had been with that company during the campaign in France. Peiper's predecessor as

commander of the 11. Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Albert Frey, wrote:

And I should make some comment concerning Hauptsturm-führer Jochen Peiper, the man who replaced me as commander of my 11. Kompanie. Jochen was of unusually good appearance, about 6' tall, slender, with a narrow face, and graceful in movement. Elsewhere, I commented that Eberhard Wörbach — a comrade from my days at Ellwangen — looked like the prototype of a "prince" as conceived by the young girls in an all-girl school. Jochen Peiper also belonged to this enviable type of man.<sup>5</sup>

Both officers, Frey and Peiper, would later become good frontline comrades. According to the diary of SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Meier of the 11. Kompanie, Peiper took over command of the company on 11 October 1941.6

On 7 October 1941 the Leibstandarte took Berdjansk and, on the next day, Mariupol, where Peiper's company encountered a number of civilians who were dragging sacks of money out of the administrative offices of a foundry. The company mopped up the northern sector of this large city. From 12 to 16 October 1941 the LAH forced the crossing of the Mius and, on 13 October, at Troizkoje, a Soviet aircraft was brought down by small arms fire from Peiper's company. The company later received a recognition certificate from the High Command of the Army for its feat. 8

On 17 October 1941 the division attacked Taganrog. The III. Bataillon jumped off at 0530 across flat open terrain, with the 12. and 13. Kompanien in front and Peiper's 11. Kompanie following. As elements of the lead companies crossed the railway around 1100 to the accompaniment of buglers blowing attack signals, two Soviet armored trains suddenly rolled out of Taganrog towards them. Although the trains were halted by SS-Sturmmann Fruth's 3.7 cm antitank cannons, their cannon, flak and machine guns were still able to inflict heavy losses on the III. Bataillon, lying on the ground without cover. Peiper's company was located between the 12. and 13. Kompanien. The situation was extremely critical. Many of the men in Peiper's company had taken cover in a ditch which made a right angle with the railway and, tragically enough, were in the middle of the fields of fire of one of the train's cars. These men were killed. The battalion commander, Albert Frey, was in a shell hole near a railway worker's shack, not 30 feet away from the rails. He had lost contact with the artillery and flak attached to him. Frey ordered personal contact to be made with the artillery.

SS-Unterscharführer Oberkofler from Peiper's company jumped up and collapsed within a few strides, hit by several bullets. After Frey finally established radio contact with the attached 1. Feldhaubitze-Batterie, it was unable to place effective fire on the armored trains. This meant that the defenseless men of the battalion were endangered. They steadfastly suffered further casualties. Finally, the battery commanders each brought up a howitzer and an 88 mm antiaircraft gun into direct firing positions and immediately scored hits on the trains. They began to burn while some of the cars exploded.9

The attack started to move forward again and the Leibstandarte was able to take the port city of Taganrog by evening. The III./LAH was on the north edge of the city. SS-Hauptsturmführer Peiper was concerned by the heavy losses taken by his company. On 20 October 1941, the Leibstandarte attacked to the northwest and Peiper's company reached Ssambek. The attack came to a halt on 23 October and, based on an order from the corps (which cited resupply reasons), the LAH had to occupy a 17-mile-wide defensive sector. 10 During the following weeks the exhausted and emaciated soldiers of the Leibstandarte occupied field positions; the officers and men vegetated in filthy holes in the ground, tormented by lice. There were no villages. At night the temperature dropped to 20 degrees below zero (Celsius). The enemy artillery fired on them and enemy reconnaissance and combat patrols felt their way forward against LAH security. The men and equipment of the III. Bataillon had sunk to half of its authorized complement.11 On 31 October 1941 Peiper's company consisted of three officers, eight noncommissioned officers and 82 men.

On 2 November 1941 Peiper presented SS-Unterscharführer Sebastian Klappacher of his company with the Iron Cross, 1st Class. The Reichsführer SS visited the Leibstandarte on this day and presented the Iron Cross, 1st Class, to some of the members of the assault-gun battery.<sup>12</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Meier from Graz (Austria) recalled his commander during this period:

Before the attack on Rostow I was in a very exposed positions for a long time as a forward observer. Because of the unpleasant circumstances I had a nasty stomach-intestinal problem and Peiper insisted, whenever I was in particularly bad shape, upon spending the night with me in the hole, and he insisted that I leave the post against my will. The approach to my observation post wasn't the healthiest, either, as Ivan had a good view of the terrain. Just this experience with Peiper taught me that he didn't just obviously give more of himself than everyone else, but that his outward sensitive manner corresponded to his real character. He had none of the signs of crude camaraderie or coarseness. Perhaps it was a holdover of his earlier employment in the highest circles. But I don't think that this was the only determining factor. It was a permanent part of his personality. He also carried this refined sensibility into his dealings with his subordinates. He was certainly brave when the situation called for it, and he had a healthy, but by no means obnoxious, desire to excel. He was a successful troop commander. I believe that there was no subordinate or contemporary of his who knew him and did not respect him. In one word; he was liked by every unit that was under him. 13

On 17 November 1941 the attack on Rostow began and the following day saw Peiper's company engaged against stubborn resistance east of Krasny Krim. On 19 November the I. and III./LAH attacked Sultan Saly from the southeast, and the IV./LAH pushed into the heavily fortified village from the northeast. SS-Unterscharführer Sauter reported a critical situation at the 8./SS-Artillerie-Regiment LAH:

In the early morning hours, change of position to Krasny Krim. About one kilometer in front of the village, the battery, still on the march, ran into a strong Russian unit which was trying to break out. We managed to keep the Russians at a distance with the two guns we got unlimbered and with small

arms. Then our unit of about 60 men formed a hedgehog position in the open field. In a very short time, our howitzers were put out of action by antitank guns. They stood out like barn doors in open field. Considerable losses from artillery, antitank fire and, above all, from machine gun fire. Just when our ammunition had almost run out and hardly any of the cannoneers were unwounded, four Sturmgeschütze under Untersturmführer Isecke and the 11. Kompanie (Peiper) appeared and reinforced our hedgehog position. A few tanks from Panzer-Regiment 4 were called up by radio and they attacked the Russians. The Russians put up almost no further resistance. These tanks, the 15 men of the 11. Kompanie and the 11 surviving slightly wounded cannoneers of the 8. Batterie took in 1100 prisoners. 14

The III. Bataillon carried out a reconnaissance in force and reported strong enemy field fortifications in front of Rostow, especially at the airfield. On 20 November 1941 the Leibstandarte launched an attack on Rostow on the Don. At 1230 hours the airfield was taken and after that Peiper found himself on the north edge of the city in heavy fighting in front of strong field positions covered by antitank and artillery fire. At 1330 hours his company was involved in house-to-house fighting in the city, along with most of the I. and III. Bataillone. In a bold attack, the 3. Kompanie under SS-Hauptsturmführer Hein Springer managed to capture the big railroad bridge over the Don undamaged.

The commander of the III./LAH, SS-Hauptsturmführer Frey, wrote:

My old 11. Kompanie under Jochen Peiper found itself at the exit to the Taganrog Bridge ... It crossed the Don in the direction of Bataisk, a village on the other bank. As soon as darkness fell, and on through the entire night, a large number of disorganized Russians, as well as Russian units marching with order and discipline, streamed towards the bridge in order to get over to the southern bank of the Don ...

But when the enemy forces trying to get to the other side of the river became increasingly numerous I had second thoughts. I directed the fighting to stop and pulled the 11. Kompanie back under cover. I was afraid of getting into a fight during the night during which the enemy could have obtained the upper hand. This gave rise to the grotesque situation that the remnants of my 11. Kompanie – I believe there were no more than 30 men left – hid in a cellar, while the Russians, including horse-drawn artillery, raced by foot and galloped across the bridge in great numbers throughout the entire night. <sup>15</sup>

The fighting in the streets of the city, in which armed civilians also participated, lasted that day and the entire following night. Then Rostow, the door to the Caucasus, was in German hands. Mopping up actions lasted until 21 November 1941 and the III./LAH covered the Don, west of the bridge. However, when a Soviet attack towards Mariupol against the LAH's northern neighbor threatened to cut off the III. Panzer-Korps, the exposed position in Rostow could no longer be held. So the corps and the Leibstandarte had to be pulled back to a shorter position behind the Mius. The next few days were marked by continuous Russian attacks on the positions of the Leibstandarte's exhausted battalions. On 28 November 1941

Peiper's company evacuated the Don Position and marched through Rostow as a rear guard with the III. Bataillon until it ran into T-34's at Leninowan, which were finally engaged by an artillery battery.

On 1 December 1941 the division moved into the Mius sector and built its winter position on the Ssambek in icy temperatures. The men had to work hard to dig into the solidly frozen ground in order to build their trenches, shelters, and bunkers. The III. Bataillon was in position some 15 kilometers north of Taganrog on the west bank of the Ssambek. Both friend and foe had wide-open terrain with good visibility. The Russians launched continuous, stubborn attacks in vain attempts to break through the defense lines. Peiper spent Christmas with his company in this atmosphere of frigid trench warfare. On 30 December 1941, on his recommendation, SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Buchwald and SS-Obersturmführer Otto Pinter received the Iron Cross 1st Class. SS-Rottenführer Karl-Heinz Wilms had also received it on 3 December. In 1941 Jochen Peiper had suffered ruptures in both eardrums, a shrapnel wound in the middle of the right knee joint and a concussion.<sup>16</sup> But these wounds must have made little impression on him. He never had them verified and they weren't entered into his pay book, since in various personnel documents for 1942 and 1943 he is listed as unwounded. Moreover, he didn't receive a wound badge.<sup>17</sup> An indication of Peiper's modesty, he made no fuss over these things.

The Leibstandarte remained in this winter position on the Ssambek until 2 June 1942. During these long months the men of the emaciated companies lay in their trenches and bunkers facing the enemy. Peiper had his 27th birthday on 30 January 1942, which a number of officers, among them the commander of the reconnaissance battalion, SS-Hauptsturmführer Hugo Kraas, helped him celebrate. During this period SS-Oberscharführer Alois Tilly, who had been severely wounded in the stomach some months previously, showed up again at the 11. Kompanie. Scarcely back on his feet, he came back to the front from the hospital on his own initiative, without taking convalescent leave. He came back to the company because, as he put it to his battalion commander Albert Frey, he was at home there. 18 Most the men of the Leibstandarte possessed this kind of unspoken idealism.

During this barren period of position warfare Peiper received the news that on 14 April 1942 his son Hinrich first saw the light of day in Berlin. His wife, Sigurd, had already given birth to a second child after their daughter Elke, who was born on 7 July 1940. Peiper was extremely happy about his new son and heir. Shortly thereafter, he received some bad news. On 11 May 1942 his oldest brother Hans-Hasso, who was just 32 years old, died of tuberculosis in Berlin-Weißensee.19 He had been receiving treatment there in St. Joseph's Sanitarium since September 1931.<sup>20</sup> He was buried in the Berlin-Dahlem forest cemetery, where he found his last resting place next to his brother Horst who had died the previous year.21 Jochen became the last of the three sons of the Peiper family. This meant that either he or his family could have invoked the sole-surviving-son clause which would have pulled him out of direct frontline service. The division never received any such application.

After 3 July 1942 the 11. Kompanie moved into the Stalino area with the Leibstandarte. In Stalino it began a major reorganization. On 5 July 1942 the six infantry battalions which were on hand were organized into two regiments. The V. Bataillon had come from the Leningrad Front and the newly-formed VI. Bataillon had just arrived from Germany to join the Leibstandarte. The III./LAH became the II. Bataillon in the 1. SS-Infantry Regiment. On 1 May 1942 SS-Hauptsturmführer Max Hansen had taken over command of the battalion and SS-Obersturmbannführer Fritz Witt took command of the 1. Regiment. Peiper's 11. Kompanie became the 6./SS-Infantry Regiment 1 LSSAH. The Leibstandarte was directed to conduct its equipment reorganization in France.

## The Leibstandarte Transfers to France: 12 July 1942 to 11 January 1943

On 12 July 1942 the division began its move by rail, arriving in the area east of Paris by 26 July 26. On 29 July 1942 a parade took place in Paris, in which the motorized Leibstandarte passed in review before the Commander-in-Chief West, Generalfeld-marschall von Rundstedt. After that, the division was shifted into an area west of Paris, where it was re-equipped as a Panzergrenadier division. A tank battalion had already been raised for this purpose in Germany in February 1942, as well as an antitank battalion and an assault gun battalion. The artillery had been increased to four battalions, and the two infantry regiments had three battalions, as well as the appropriate regimental units. The coming summer weeks were full of hard training exercises for the troops and the newly arrived replacements.

### Peiper Becomes the Commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH

On 1 September 1942 Jochen Peiper was awarded the East Front Medal. On 14 September 1942 another task awaited the company commander: He became commander of the III. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 2 of the Leibstandarte. This battalion had been commanded since the summer of 1941 by SS-Sturmbannführer Günther Anhalt who, for various reasons, was overtaxed by his command. When Anhalt received orders relieving him of command, he left the battalion immediately without either saying farewell to his men or handing over the unit to his successor.<sup>3</sup>

The III./SS-Infantry-Regiment 2 LSSAH was a young battalion in comparison to the others, as it had only been formed in June 1941 in the Wischau area as the IV./LAH. The 16. And 17. Kompanien were taken into the battalion in their entirety from the Leibstandarte's Guard Bataillon in Berlin, while the 18., and 19. (machine gun), and 20. (heavy weapons) Kompanien were recruited from various units, but particularly from drafts from the 8. and 10. SS-Totenkopf-Regimenter. When the Leibstandarte's two infantry regiments were formed in July 1942 the IV./LAH became the III./SS-Infantry-Regiment 2 LSSAH and consisted of a motorized infantry battalion with company numbers from 11 to 15. Peiper's took command rapidly. SS-Rottenführer Günther Gaul of the 12.

Kompanie recalled: "When he took over the III. Bataillon, there was a huge whirlwind. Peiper appeared every morning at the companies and monitored the training schedules. There were exercises and parade ground drill. We were not thrilled."

Shortly after taking command, Peiper introduced himself to his men in Verneuil. SS-Sturmmann Erich Schöbel recalled that:

On that day the battalion was formed up in an open square. One of the officers, Otto Dinse, made a short speech and referred to the assumption of command by the new battalion commander, Hauptsturmführer Peiper. While he was doing this Peiper was somewhat off to the side, walking back and forth in his walking-out uniform, evidently going over the contents of his speech in his mind. Then he started to speak and praised the earlier operations of our unit, a unit that the Führer could always rely on. However, we were now faced with new tasks, which would require additional training, even for frontline veterans. He was taking over the battalion from Sturmbannführer Anhalt and expected the same obedience from us that we gave to him. 5

The new commander immediately began extensive field exercises which expanded to involve the entire battalion. During these exercises even the company commanders had to play the part. If they didn't meet Peiper's expectations, he corrected them, sometimes right in front of the men. The men were impressed by the virtually identical treatment which Peiper gave to officers, noncommissioned officers and men.<sup>6</sup> By 20 September 1942 Peiper had already been recommended for promotion to SS-Sturmbannführer by his regimental commander, SS-Obersturmbannführer Wisch. With reference to his suitability, Wisch wrote: "Years of experience with every branch of service ... remarkable accomplishments as a company commander in the eastern campaign ... as well as his extremely rapid adjustment to his new command responsibilities." His former regimental commander, Obersturmbannführer Fritz Witt enlarged on this:

"In character, straight and above-board, reserved. Sharp observer. Hard and even cynical in criticism. Calm and clear-thinking combat leader. Meticulous and innovative in training. Clear tactical thinking and actions. He is leaving us a very valuable company in every respect" Peiper's promotion, however, was refused on 9 November 1942, presumably on the basis of his young age.8

Peiper's battalion staff was located in Verneuil-sur-Avre, west of Dreux, in a small castle within a park behind the market place. The 11. Kompanie was located in Chaise Dieu du Theil, east of L'Aigle, and the 12. Kompanie had its quarters in the middle of the city of Verneuil in a hall which had once been used as a church. The 13. Kompanie was first in Les Ventes and then in the Verneuil School. The 14. (MG) Kompanie was in École des Roches and the 15. (schwere) Kompanie was in Chennebrun. In September 1942 the Kraderkundungszug (Motorcycle Terrain Reconaissance Platoon), under SS-Untersturmführer Georg Preuß, was reactivated and equipped with twelve BMW R-75 motorcycles. The platoon dispatch runner had a one-man machine. The platoon was quartered in a building between the railroad station and Verneuil's market.

Peiper had requested his old company comrade, SS-Obersturmführer Paul Guhl, who was at the SS-NCO Academy at Lauenburg, whom he wanted to use as a company commander. After his arrival, Peiper assigned him to conduct an NCO course in Dreux, and then gave him command of the 11. Kompanie. 9 As commander of the 13. Kompanie, Peiper brought SS-Obersturmführer Otto Pinter to the battalion, who had already served under him in Russia as a platoon leader in the 11./LAH and had been awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class. Peiper's battalion adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, was supposed to be relieved. However, he reported to Peiper and, in a long, detailed conversation, presented the reasons for his request for permission to stay on as battalion adjutant. Peiper let himself be convinced, since Dinse had been in the battalion since 1941. He kept him on as adjutant.<sup>10</sup> The short, wiry Hamburger, who was a regular officer in the Allgemeine SS, became Peiper's able and valued adjutant, and his reputation spread beyond the battalion. For the entire 2. Regiment the months of August and September passed in intensive field training, along with squad and platoon exercises.11

During the field exercises the motorcycles of the III. Bataillon under SS-Untersturmführer Preuß often added inspections of the numerous castles in the Dreuz, L'Aigle, and Verneuil area. The young officer from Danzig enjoyed conversations with the French nobility, and he was often seen in friendly conversation with French priests and the people in the villages that he passed through.<sup>12</sup>

On 14 October 1942 orders were issued for raising an additional Panzer battalion for the Leibstandarte, so that it could have a Panzer regiment. This would give the division the organization of a Panzer division. Toward the end of October more company and battalion exercises took place. On 1 November 1942 Peiper's battalion held a sports contest, which every member of the III./SS-Infanterie-Regiment 2 remembers fondly, in spite of the rain. The Leibstandarte was officially redesignated a Panzergrenadier-Division, effective 24 November 1942.

On the same date orders were issued for the formation of a Schützenpanzerwagen-Bataillon (Armored Personnel Carrier Battalion, abbreviated as SPW), for which the Main Command Office designated the III. Bataillon of SS-Infantry-Regiment 2.13 This meant a new, more responsible, and more difficult job for Peiper. He had to reorganize a motorized infantry battalion into an SPW battalion. The III. Bataillon of SS-Infantry-Regiment 2 LSSAH was redesignated the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH. His companies were organized according to the wartime tables of organization and equipment for SPW companies. As there was no machine gun company in an SPW battalion, the 14. (MG) Kompanie was dissolved and its personnel added to the 15. (schwere) Kompanie which was then renamed the 14. (schwere, gepanzerte) Kompanie. The SPW-Bataillon no longer had a 15. Kompanie.

A heavy machine gun platoon and a mortar section were transferred from the former 14. (MG) Kompanie to the divisional staff.<sup>14</sup> Among others, SS-Unterscharführer and mortar section leaders Hans Fuchs and Rudi Vieten from the former 15. (schwere) Kompanie were transferred to the 11. and 12.

Kompanien respectively, where they took over mortar sections in the heavy weapons platoons. The battalion then consisted of the 11. through 14. (gep.) Kompanien.

The previously issued Steyr vehicles were turned in and soon after the SPW arrived in company-sized increments.<sup>15</sup> The battalion immediately began intensive driver training to train drivers for the new SPW. This included trips for supplies in order to save scarce petroleum products.<sup>16</sup> As the SPW were the main element of Peiper's battalion, these should be described a little more closely. Right from the start, the army sought suitable motorization for the infantry elements which were to accompany tanks. Generaloberst Guderian wrote:

We never achieved the desired rate of development of tracked vehicles for a force to complement the tanks. It was clear that the closer the mounted riflemen, artillery and other weapons of the division could keep to the tanks when they traveled cross-country, the more effective the tanks would be. We asked for lightly armored, half-track vehicles for the mounted riflemen, the combat engineers, and the medics, and armored self-propelled carriages for the artillery and antitank battalions.<sup>17</sup>

The SPW developed a special tactical significance for the Panzer divisions. After the tanks had broken through the enemy positions they were often unable to remain very long behind the enemy lines as they were unable to occupy enemy territory for any length of time without infantry support. For this reason the Panzergrenadiere had to have the necessary mobility to follow close behind the tanks cross-country, to exploit their breakthroughs and to resist infantry attacks.

Thus was born the basic idea of the SPW. The 3-ton prime mover was converted to a lightly armored model under the name "medium armored vehicle" (Sd.Kfz. 251). The chassis (Hkl 6p) was developed by the Hanomag firm, and the armorplated superstructure was produced by the combined efforts of Büssing-NAG in Berlin-Oberschöneweide and the Deutschen-Werke in Kiel. Planning began in 1937 and the first "medium armored crew transport vehicle" (mittlerer gepanzerter Mannschaftstransport-wagen or MTW) was delivered in 1938. MTW was the initial popular designation that was later replaced by the famous SPW. In comparison to the 3-ton half-track prime mover, the SPW had a few modifications in the cooling and steering systems, fuel tank and exhaust arrangement, while the chassis remained the same.

The superstructure consisted of armor for the front, sides, bottom, driver's compartment and troop compartment. The main part was assembled from welded or riveted bulletproof steel plates. In order to take penetrating force from shells, the plates were sloped at an angle. They were proof against direct fire from armor-piercing bullets. The crew compartments with the open troop compartment were separated from the engine compartment by a fire wall. There was space to store ammunition and other gear under the benches along the long sides. The back wall had a double door. The driver and radio operator seats were adjustable. Driver and assistant driver had adjustable observation ports at eye height, the slits of which were protected by removable glass vision blocks.

The armor plate was 1.45 cm thick on the sides and 0.8 cm

thick at the rear. For weapons, a removable and traversable armored shield for an MG 42 was mounted on the armored deck over the driver. There were also SPW which mounted the machine gun without this protective shield. At the rear end of the troop compartment, which was meant for a squad, there was a swinging arm for mounting another machine gun. This was the usual equipment for a squad SPW. The SPW-Bataillon of the Leibstandarte was equipped with the Sd.Kfz 251, Ausführung (Model) C, in November 1942. There were numerous variations of this model, which differed primarily in their armament: tank cannon, antitank gun, flame-throwers, etc.

Along with these 3-ton SPW, there were the 1-ton SPW, the Sd.Kfz. 250, which was designed as a vehicle for half a squad. It was based on the 1-ton prime mover developed by the Demag concern, with shortened running gear and modified cooling system, steering, fuel tank, and exhaust. The sheet steel body was replaced by armor plate. The Büssing-NAG concern in Berlin was also responsible for the armored superstructure. The front armor was bolted to the body armor. The welded armor plates were sloped away from the expected direction of enemy fire and were also proof against armorpiercing bullets in direct fire. The armor plates were bolted to the superstructure. Starting in 1940, the 1-ton SPW was powered by a Maybach HL 42 TUKRR engine equipped with a semi-automatic Maybach gear shift regulator (VG 102 128 H), which had seven forward and three reverse speeds. The crew compartment was shielded by the hull armor and separated from the engine compartment by a fire wall. The door was located in the left of the rear wall. It could carry up to seven men. The armor plating facing the front was 1.45 cm thick, while that on the sides and rear was 0.8 cm thick. The total weight was 5.8 tons.

This light SPW was also manufactured in numerous versions.<sup>18</sup> Initially in the Leibstandarte's SPW-Bataillon, the company headquarters vehicles were the 1-ton SPW, as was the platoon leader's vehicles in the heavy platoons. Some of the staff also received them. In all other instances, the 3-ton vehicle was used exclusively. These SPW had the MG 42 with shield mounted up forward and some of them had the swiveling arm for a second machine gun mounted aft.<sup>19</sup>

Training the companies with the SPW did not turn out well for Peiper, as fuel shortages prohibited exercises at the platoon or company level.20 A dismounted maneuver was carried out at the battalion level, when the companies moved for kilometers in complete marching kit, while Peiper stayed in constant contact with his platoons, keeping an eye on the officers and men. The 12. (gep.) Kompanie was given the mission of taking the enemy in the rear.21 The squads practiced mounting their SPW as well as evacuating and jumping out at the rear through the double doors, as well as over the sides.22 The men were skeptical of the armor and in the 13. (gep.) Kompanie some men fired their rifles at the armor to see if it was really bullet proof. This turned out to be the case.<sup>23</sup> A noncommissioned officer squad leader was detached from each platoon and sent to an SPW course taught by the army at Weimar.<sup>24</sup> The 2. Regiment carried out extensive exercises during the period from 14 October to 6 November 1942, to include training at night.

The army high command issued an alert several times during November; orders were given to prepare to move out, and each time they were canceled. Peiper was frequently at the individual companies and would show up unexpectedly at field exercises and lectures. He became famous for his very sarcastic commentaries, such as: "You move like an African cargo camel", commenting on the speed of Heinz Glenewinkel (who came from Sumatra) during an exercise at the 13. Kompanie.<sup>25</sup>

Even during the organizational phase in France, a few companies began to make internal modifications to their SPW, to which others would follow while in action on the Eastern Front. Many SPW crews fortified both long open sides of their SPW with tree limbs as thick as a person's arm to reduce the effects of shell splinters in the completely open compartment. The 11. Kompanie made a particularly clever modification to its SPW. An additional armor plate was mounted on the front armor to provide better protection against direct fire. In this connection, SPW driver Johannes Bräuer recalled:

I can clearly remember that right after we got the new SPW in France, Guhl and Wolff tested them to see if the armor in front and between the two hatches would stand up to fire from armor piercing rifle ammunition. This only became known a couple of days later. In any case, the bullets penetrated and for this reason, somewhere in a large forge or similar installation, two thick milled steel plates about one cm thick were placed together and attached about 5 cm in front of the prow with heavy angle iron. <sup>27</sup>

For this reason, the company was jokingly called the "double armored" 11th from then on. The other companies reinforced the front of the half-track in part by mounting track links there.

Each company in Peiper's battalion received 18 SPW. The companies were made up of four platoons, with the first three platoons with four SPW, one of which served the platoon leader along with his platoon headquarters. Some of these were equipped with a 3.7 cm antitank gun. The three platoon squads were carried in the other three SPW. The fourth platoon was organized as a heavy weapons platoon with a machine gun section and a mortar section - each with two squads - for a total of four SPW. The heavy machine gun section had MG 42s on tripods and machine guns mounted in the SPW on a swiveling arm. The mortar section had an 8 cm mortar with a base plate mounted in the SPW, and an additional base plate for use outside the vehicle.28 At first, the platoon leaders of the four platoons were provided with the 1 ton SPW.29 The 11., 12. and 13.(gep.) Kompanien were organized in this way. Both the company commander and his headquarters section leader each had his own SPW, which was a 1-ton SPW in the latter's case.

The 14. Kompanie was the heavy/armored weapons company and contained an antitank platoon with three 5 cm antitank guns towed by SPW. Initially, the platoon leader was SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs from Hamburg, who had already been a member of the heavy company's antitank platoon as a Sturmmann in 1941 and, after attending the Officer Candidate School at Bad Tölz, had returned to the unit. Later the platoon was taken over by SS-Untersturmführer David Margait from Neulinkuhnen in East Prussia. He had the Iron Cross, 1st Class and, like the company commander, Kolitz,

had been a member of the Leibstandarte's old 14. Pak-Kompanie under Kurt Meyer before the war.

In addition, the 14. Kompanie contained an antitank squad led by SS-Hauptscharführer Jochen Thiele. It had three 1-ton SPW with M41 anti-tank rifles. It also had the Infanterie-Geschütz-Zug (infantry gun platoon) with four 7.5 cm infantry howitzers towed by SPW (SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Noth), the Kraftwagen-Kanonen-Zug (gun platoon), with 3 7.5 cm cannons mounted on SPW (formed by SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs in January 1943) and the Pionierzug (combat engineer platoon) with four SPW (SS-Oberscharführer Fritz Haferstroh). The company was commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Rolf Kolitz, who had commanded the heavy weapons company since 1941.

Basically, all the SPW had radios. Three-axle trucks by Krupp and Opel-Allrad were provided for supply transport. Along with the field, gunnery, and driver training, tactical training was held around the sand table for the noncommissioned officers, frequently in the evening. The men always had to expect Peiper to show up unexpectedly.<sup>30</sup> The commander was very interested in the training and continuing tactical professional development of his officers and noncommissioned officers and gave it constant encouragement.

Below, we will provide a short introduction to the company commanders and platoon leaders. Those of the 14. Kompanie have already been mentioned.

SS-Obersturmführer Paul Guhl commanded the 11. Kompanie. Peiper had known him since 1936 when Guhl was still a noncommissioned officer in the 11./LAH. The 26-yearold from Stuttgart was given a field commission for bravery during the Polish campaign, won the Iron Cross, 1st Class and had participated in the French campaign as an Untersturmführer in the 11. Kompanie under Peiper. At the end of 1940 he was transferred to the Lauenburg SS-Noncommissioned Officer Academy with most of the company, where Peiper asked for him in the fall of 1942.31 His platoon leaders were SS-Untersturmführer Rudi Wetzel, SS-Obersturmführer Karl Döring, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff and SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Hansel. Promoted to SS-Untersturmführer on 21 June 1942 at the age of 19 after attending the Bad Tölz Officer Candidate School, Wolff was the youngest officer in the division.

The 28-year-old SS-Obersturmführer Lukas "Lux" Westrup from Bokel in the Luneburger Heide commanded the 12. Kompanie. He had already commanded the company in 1941 when it was the 17./LAH and had been awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class in Russia in 1941. His platoon leaders were SS-Untersturmführer Hans Schmidt, SS-Untersturmführer Dieter Kihl, SS-Untersturmführer Otto Bölck and SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Vieten.

SS-Obersturmführer Otto Pinter commanded the 13. Kompanie. He had already served under Peiper in 1940 and 1941 as a platoon leader in his company and had received the Iron Cross, 1st Class. His platoon leaders were SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt, SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Thumeyer, SS-Untersturmführer Joachim Kaden, SS-Untersturmführer Wolfgang Pfitzner, and, later, SS-Untersturmführer Wolfgang Pfitzner, and, later, SS-

Untersturmführer Georg Preuß.

The battalion surgeon was SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Robert Brüstle, assistant surgeon was SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Friedrich Breme. In every company there were veteran noncommissioned officers and men, some of whom had already been decorated for bravery on the Eastern Front with both Iron Crosses: SS-Sturmmann Hans Seiffert of the combat engineer platoon of the 14. Kompanie; SS-Rottenführer Karl Übler, SS-Unterscharführer Karl Kaspari and SS-Unterscharführer Egmont Eichler of the 12. Kompanie; SS-Sturmmann Georg Heisig of the 13. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer August Schirmag and SS-Rottenführer Kurt Rieger of the 11. Kompanie (to only mention a few). They, the combat veterans from the Eastern Front, along with the newly-arrived Panzergrenadiere and the young platoon leaders trained at the officer candidate schools, made up an ideal team. Because of their readiness for action they seemed capable of performing great military deeds.

SS-Obersturmführer Guhl trained his 11. Kompanie in Chaise Dieu hard and relentlessly. The SPW were located in the park behind the castle. As an SPW offered too little room for a complete squad – 12 men – he ordered that in action only six men should ride.<sup>32</sup> He paid special attention to the training of his noncommissioned officers, to which he assigned high standards. "If we're already number 1, then we have to be number 1 in everything." (He was referring to the fact that his SPW-Kompanie was the first numerical company in the battalion).<sup>33</sup>

During the sand table exercises his noncommissioned officers could never feel safe from him and his harsh criticisms. If Guhl wasn't pleased with their answers to tactical questions, he would fly into a rage and frequently the noncommissioned officers heard: "Man, how did you get an Iron Cross, 1st Class?"

He himself wore the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.<sup>34</sup> For Guhl, the sand table was his only opportunity to get his tactical ideas across. The SPW were to be deployed in depth. Guhl taught:

"The attack is nourished from the depths". 35 He was hard on his platoon leaders as well, and he once called the 20 year-old SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff a "lout". 36 An SPW driver wrote about Guhl:

"He radiated ambition and toughness, but he always had Peiper's full support, even when he sometimes went over the top. His motto was: "Sweat saves blood" and if one of his men were to be killed in action, his epitaph would never be, "Here lies a poor soldier".<sup>37</sup>

Jochen Peiper devoted himself with energy and thought to the training of his battalion, which he soon stamped with the force of his personality. He was also interested in maintaining good relations with the French populace in the small town of Verneuil and maintained contact with the representatives of the nobles and the priests.<sup>38</sup> He even went so far as to invite the parish priest to an evening at his battalion officers' mess.<sup>39</sup> Peiper generally maintained professional relations with the men of his battalion, but he also appeared at the companies' social events. Although he appeared every inch the commander during his visits to company quarters, he was sometimes

rather free and easy and played table tennis in Verneuil with a Rottenführer.<sup>40</sup>

On 30 November 1942 SS-Sturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, who commanded the regiment in Wisch's absence, wrote in his evaluation of Peiper:

Intellectual abilities are far above average. He has a very good general education. Physically, Peiper is well developed and has an athletic build. He is tough and has endurance. Peiper is unconditionally dependable, has a fine character, and is a helpful comrade. He is a sharp observer and critical in his judgments. His professional knowledge and accomplishments are to be rated as very good in the fields of tactics and combat training. 41

Jochen Peiper's father Woldemar also reported voluntarily to the army for service when the war began and, on 10 November 1939, went to the Kraftfahr-Ersatz-Abteilung 3 (Transportation Replacement Battalion 3) as a Hauptmann. On 1 September 1940 the 62-year-old man was promoted to Major. Later on he was with the Tank Repair Facility in Litzmannstadt, then assigned to the officer reserve of Defense District III in Berlin and received the War Service Cross, 2nd Class, with Swords. On 24 April 1942 he was sent to the Wilmersdorf Reserve Hospital because of heart strain and, ultimately, he was sent to the Gastein Reserve Hospital for treatment.<sup>42</sup>

SS-Sturmmann Franz Neuendorff of the Motorcycle Reconnaissance Platoon comments on Jochen Peiper's habit of making unexpected appearances at training and classes:—

Professional Development: Conduct in Public by Gruppenführer "Racket" Meyer - as we called him - from Hamburg. Suddenly the door opened and the commander, Hauptsturmführer Peiper, entered the room. Erwin Meyer reported. Peiper asked: "What's your topic?" "Conduct in public." At that point, the commander said: "What a dry, stupid topic. Let me tell you a story. In 1937 I was a young Untersturmführer and had to take an Oberscharführer on patrol in civilian clothes to check up on soldiers by going through the famous bars in Berlin: Mokka, Efti, Friedrichstraße, Bayernhof, etc. We entered the Bayernhof. First impression: In the hat-check room, a drunken SS-Mann in his black walking-out uniform. I took hold of the man. When he saw me, he said to me: 'Even if you're Untersturmführer Peiper, you're in civilian clothes now, and you can't do anything to me'. So along with the Oberscharführer, I immediately seized the man in question and got a taxi. But he was one of those people who get in from the left side of the taxi and get right out again at the right. We chased him down in front of the Bayernhof and finally caught him again and drove to the barracks in Lichtefelde. It was 2205. I told the man in question: 'Beat it over the south field. You know the way. But if I catch you again, you'll be confined to barracks'. 43

In the first weeks of December in 1942 the Leibstandarte was given examinations for fitness for tropical service, which led to the supposition that the division was going into action in Africa. From 17 to 18 December 1942 Peiper was sent to the Gunnery School of the Army Armor School at Putlos for a battalion command course (armor course). 44 A detachment of dri-

vers under the command of Peiper's orderly, SS-Untersturmführer Möhrlin, drove to Berlin just before Christmas to get additional SPW from Spandau. The detachment returned to the battalion with them in January 1943. On 24 December 1942 the men of the SPW Bataillon celebrated Christmas in harmony and friendship in their companies. The divisional commander, SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich, visited every unit. While the hopes of the men were still directed toward Africa, orders arrived on 30 December 1942 that the Leibstandarte was to be fully equipped and provided with winter clothing by 7 January 1943.

Transportation requests were to be submitted. It was clear to everyone that they were going back into action in Russia. On 31 December 1942 Peiper's men celebrated New Year's Eve in and around Verneuil in good spirits. On this occasion the companies passed out humorous newspapers, in which comical verses and sarcastic comments appeared concerning officers, noncommissioned officers and men. At midnight loud clanging bells startled everyone in Verneuil. No one knew what was going on, and some even thought it was the fire alarm. On the following day Peiper asked the assembled battalion who was responsible for the racket and the men of the motorcycle reconnaissance battalion stepped forward. When the commander discovered that the men had first collected a donation and had given this to the priest with the request that they be allowed to ring the bells no more was heard of the matter.<sup>45</sup>

The training continued. The platoon leaders were given classes on winter combat and the men put their gear in order and prepared everything for the coming operation. New gas masks were issued and, on the evening of 4 January 1943, the 14th (schwere gep.) Kompanie received new SPW. On 7 January 1943 a cannon platoon was formed, which at first consisted of three SPW with 7.5 cm cannons, but which was soon expanded to six. The platoon leader was the former antitank platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, and his gun commanders were SS-Unterscharführer Mewes, Unterscharführer Jacobi and Unterscharführer Knappe. The platoon consisted of an officer, seven noncommissioned officers and 40 men. They sighted in their 7.5 cm L/24 guns on 14 January 1943.

"Today we were with the commander. He's a neat guy. We move out on the 16th. The advance party left today," SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs noted in his diary. At this

orders group Peiper informed all the company commanders and platoon leaders of the approaching operation. <sup>46</sup> The advance party of the SPW-Bataillon, under SS-Hauptsturmführer Bormann, consisted of 2 officers, 5 noncommissioned officers and 1 enlisted man. It reported at the Argentan railroad station for transfer to the Eastern Front. <sup>47</sup> On 11 January 1943 the Bataillon was equipped with M41 flamethrowers. The motorcycle platoon was dissolved effective 13 January 1943 and its personnel, together with the motorcycle platoon personnel from the other battalions, was used to form the reconnaissance company of the 2. Regiment, which later would become the 18./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.

On 16 January 1943 the companies received winter clothing. The training schedule consisted of classes and sports. The radios for the cannon platoon didn't arrive until 25 January 1943. Jochen Peiper was promoted to SS-Sturmbannführer on 30 January 1943, his 28th birthday. The 14. Kompanie held a noncommissioned officer get-together, to which the platoon leaders were also invited. On this day the men listened to speeches by Hermann Göring and Adolf Hitler. "The address of the Führer moved us all. The Führer is the Führer!" a platoon leader wrote.<sup>48</sup>

"On 11 January 1943 the division started to load up and its transfer to the east began. The farewell to the French was a heartfelt one by many, since the men of the Leibstandarte had maintained untroubled relations with them in the past few months, and both sides had learned to respect and value each other. Many a French mother stood with tears in her eyes when the young German soldiers left their homes."

"My farewell from the people we lived with is moving. I will have to visit them after the war with Gisi," (author: his wife) wrote SS-Untersturmführer Gührs at the time. <sup>49</sup> In the pouring rain, the 14. (schwere gep.) Kompanie continued loading its 59 vehicles at the Verneuil railroad station until 1900 on 31 January 1943. The men were thinking about the approaching operations on the Eastern Front, which they all knew would demand much of them."

"I am looking forward to our employment, and I believe that we will swing things back our way again. We are all very confident," commented SS-Untersturmführer Gührs in his diary, recording the inner feelings of the men of Peiper's SPW-Bataillon and the entire Leibstandarte.<sup>50</sup>



Adolf Hitler visited the Leibstandarte during the Campaign in Poland. He is being saluted here by a helmeted Sepp Dietrich. Hidden behind Hitler is Himmler, with Bormann to the viewer's right. Horst Peiper can be seen in the extreme right-hand corner.



SS-Obersturmführer with officers of SS-Heimwehr-Danzig at Karthaus in the Polish Corridor, autumn 1939. From the left: SS-Obersturmführer Prechtel (platoon leader in the 2. Kompanie), Horst Peiper (platoon leader of the 1. Zug in the 1. Kompanie), SS-Untersturmführer Gnabs (1. Kompanie), SS-Hauptsturmführer Thier (commander 1. Kompanie) and SS-Obersturmführer Schneider (Transportation Company).



Autumn 1939, Hitler receives two boys of the Jungvolk in the Führer headquarters. Peiper is standing in the rear.



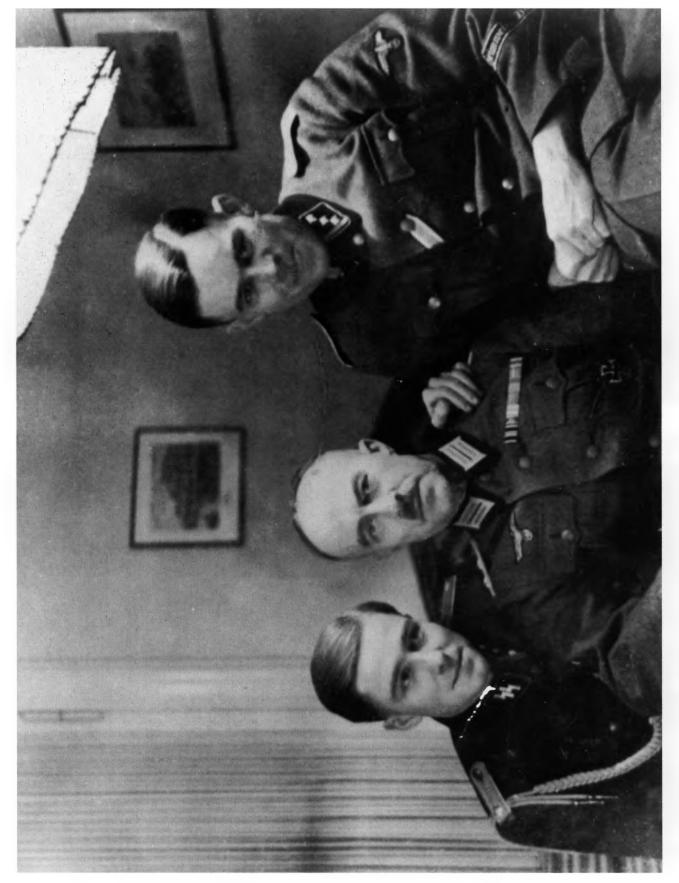
Himmler in October 1939 taking a break in the General Government of Poland. Peiper (left), Himmler (center) and Wolff (right).



Up front: Hitler and Sepp Dietrich. Behind them (from the left): Linge, Borrmann, unidentified army officer, Schaub, Wünsche, Keilhaus. Peiper can be seen between Linge and Bormann. All the way to the rear on the right is Günsche. In December 1939 Hitler participated in the Leibstandarte's Chistmas celebration at Bad Ems.



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Christmas 1939 at the parent's house in Berlin. Brothers Jochen (left) and Horst with their father Woldemar.



SS-Rottenführer Henning's squad.



The 11./LAH in Holland in May 1940.



During the French Campaign, June 1940. Peiper and Sepp Dietrich; Kurt Meyer is on the far right.



Squad vehicle of the 11./LAH in France in 1940.



Peiper with SS-Hauptsturmführer Bernhard Siebken, commander of the infantry trains of the Leibstandarte. In 1945 he received the Knight's Crawhile serving as the commander of the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. He was executed by the English in 1949.



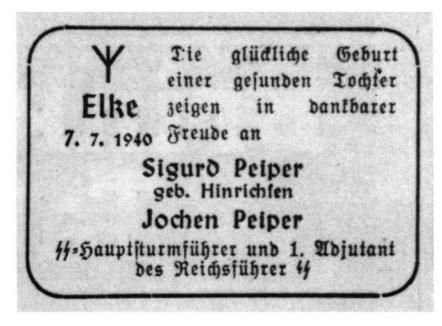
Peiper inspecting a contact strip of photos taken during the campaign.



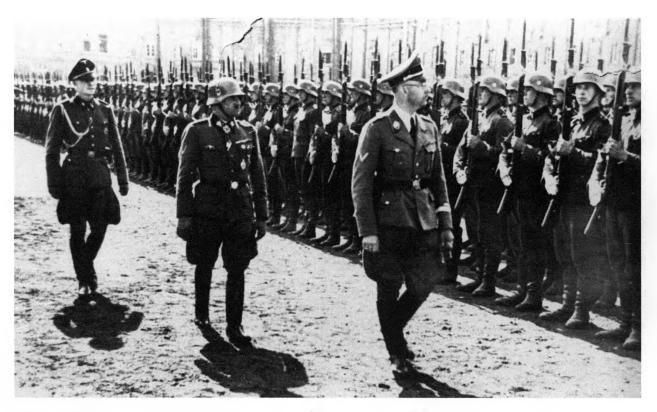
The beginning of June 1940 in northern France. Jochen Peiper, the commander of the 11./LAH, has just been promoted to Hauptsturmführer.



After the Western Campaign Jochen Peiper was transferred to the staff of the Reichsführer SS again in July 1940.



Birth announcement in the "Black Corps" for Peiper's first child, Elke, on 7 July 1940.



Metz, Fort von Alvensleben, 7 September 1940. The Reichsführer SS presents the Führer standard to the Leibstandarte. Himmler is seen trooping the line. From the left: Jochen Peiper, SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich and Himmler.



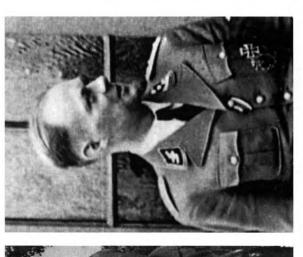
Himmler visited the Sturmgeschütz-Batterie of the Leibstandarte in Metz in September 1940. From the left: Dietrich, SS-Hauptsturmführer Max Wünsche (LAH Adjutant), Himmler, SS-Obersturmbannführer Wilhelm Keilhaus (Operations Officer) and Peiper (1st Adjutant to the Reichsführer SS).



September 1940 in Metz. From the left: Sepp Dietrich (hidden) a SS-Oberführer, Himmler and Peiper.



Left rear: Max Wünsche, LAH Adjutant. Peiper and SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich.



The Reichsführer SS presents the commander of the Leibstandarte, SSObergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich, with the Führer standard.

Werner Grothmann joined the personal staff of the Reichsführer SS in the summer of 1940. After Peiper's return to the Leibstandarte, he became the 1st Adjutant. Later on he became the Chief Adjutant for the Waffen-SS and a SS-Obersturmbann-

führer.





The Chief of the Spanish Security Police, Count de Mayalde, and the Spanish Minister of the Interior, Sennano Süner, visited the Leibstandarte barracks in September 1940 with a delegation. Himmler (third from left) leads his guest through the barracks complex. To his left is SS-Sturmbannführer Wisch, commander of the (IV.) Wachbataillon of the Leibstandarte. Peiper (on the viewer's right) in conversation with SS-Obersturmbannführer Hausdorf, Wisch's Adjutant.

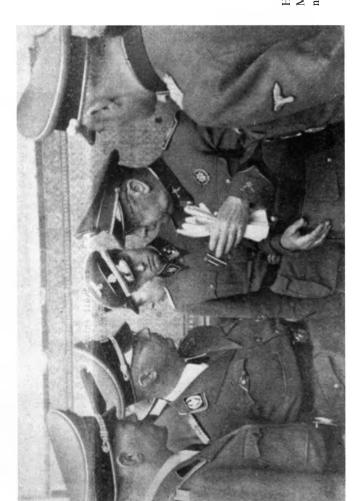
posts.

The Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police, Heinrich Himmler. During the war he also became the Minister of the Interior and Commander of the Replacement Army in addition to other

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Himmler and the Chief of the Spanish Security Police, Count des Mayalde.

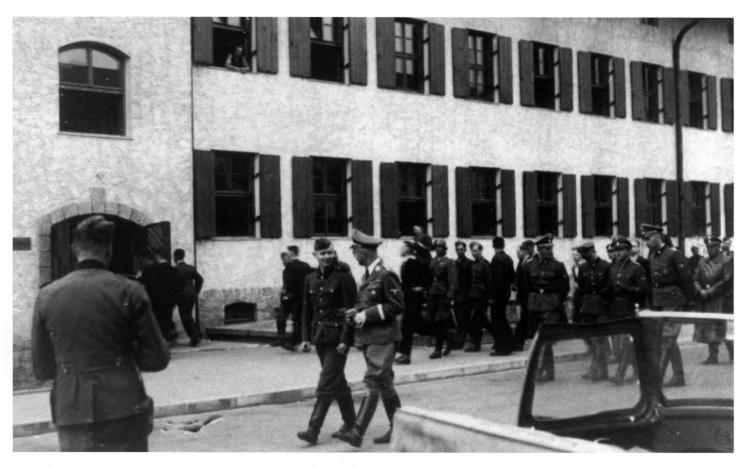


Himmler, Peiper and General Moscardo at the Alcazar, which Moscardo had defended during the Spanish Civil War with a small number of men. The Alcazar was encircled for 72 days.

In October 1940 Peiper accompanied Himmler on his visit to Spain. From the left: SS-Gruppenführer Karl Wolff, Peiper, and Himmler in conversation with Franco.







In the fall of 1940, Himmler visited the 3. Kompanie of the Replacement Battalion for the SS-Regiment "Der Führer" at Graz-Weztelsdorf. Himmler (left) with recruits, including European volunteers. Peiper third from left in the group following Himmler.



The Reichsführer in conversation with recruits. Peiper is second from the right.



Funeral of the Italian Police Chief, Senator Bocchini, in November 1940 in Rome. Heydrich (far left), Himmler (in the middle) and Peiper (behind and to the left).



Himmler, accompanied by Peiper, during one of his innumerable visits.



Adolf Hitler on 4 May 1940 on his way to a session of the Reichstag being held in the Kroll Opera in Berlin. Behind him. Himmler, Schaub and Klingemeyer (from the Wachbataillon). To the right rear: Peiper (with fouragere) and von Below.





Peiper (left rear) with Himmler at the exhibition "Construction and Planning in the East" on 20 March 1941 in Berlin. From the left: Rudolf Heß, Heinrich Himmler, General Reinhard Reinecke (in the rear), Martin Bormann and Ehrlinger.

Himmler being greeted by school children in the Warthe District on 6 May 1941.





On 9 May 1941 the Reichsführer SS visited the Leibstandarte in Tyrnavos (Greece). From the left: Max Wünsche, Sepp Dietrich, Himmler, SS-Gruppenführer Karl Wolff (hidden), Jochen Peiper and Fritz Witt.



In the bivouac area for the Leibstandarte. SS-Sturmbannführer Fritz Witt, Himmler and Peiper.



Knight's Cross winner SS-Sturmbannführer Fritz Witt (kneeling) briefs a battle from the Greek Campaign to the Reichsführer SS. From the left: Hein Springer, Sepp Dietrich, Peiper, Wünsche, Grothmann and Himmler on the far right.



Himmler being briefed on a 5 cm antitank gun. The 2nd Adjutant, Werner Grothmann, is on Himmler's right.



The Reichsführer SS and Sepp Dietrich in Tyrnavos on 9 May 1941.



Himmler visited some of the Leibstandarte's companies. Here he is in conversation with enlisted personnel of the 1./LAH. From the left: Wolff, Grothmann, Peiper, Himmler, Gerd Pleiß, (Knight's Cross winner and commander of the 1. Kompanie) and Dietrich.



Himmler visiting the 3. Kompanie. From the left: Peiper, Wolff, Himmler, Fritz Witt, Dietrich and SS-Hauptsturmführer Schiller (commander of the 3./LAH).



Horst Peiper's funeral at the Waldfriedhof in Berlin. The 20. Kompanie of the Wachbataillon provided the honor guard.



Men of the 20. Kompanie of the Wachbataillon under the command of Hauptsturmführer Kaschula.



Horst Peiper died in East Prussia on 11 June 1941. He final rank was SS-Hauptsturmführer. He was the company commander of the 1./SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung of the "Totenkopf"-Division.



Grodno, 30 June 1941. Himmler on inspection tour in the east. To the left: Jochen Peiper in overcoat and holding maps. Karl Wolff to the right.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Albert Frey and SS-Hauptsturmführer Jochen Peiper.



SS-Sturmbannführer Weidenhaupt, commander III./LAH, and Peiper at Cherson on 19 August 1941. Weidenhaupt is looking through the range finder of an 8.8 antiaircraft gun which was firing at the enemy on the opposite bank of the Dneiper.



Max Hansen, Wilhelm Weidenhaupt, Albert Frey and Peiper.



Albert Frey, Peiper (with the dispatch case), Max Hansen and Wilhelm Weidenhaupt.



Following the assumption of command by SS-Obersturmbannführer Fritz Witt of SS-Infanterie-Regiment 1 at Verneuil (France). The II./SS-Infanterie-Regiment 1 under SS-Hauptsturmführer Max Hansen marching back to its battalion area. In back, SS-Untersturmführer Alois Tilli, Otto Pinter, Peiper and Schuhknecht and SS-Obersturmführer Bleichinger followed by the 6. Kompanie. In front, on the right, the Battalion Adjutant SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Meier.



A veteran noncommissioned officer in Peiper's 11. Kompanie 1941and 1942, SS-Oberscharführer Alois Tilli was killed in action on 20 February 1943 while assigned to the 6./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 (the renamed 11./LAH).



Men of the 11./LAH in 1941. On the right: SS-Oberscharführer Engelhardt Hellmuth.



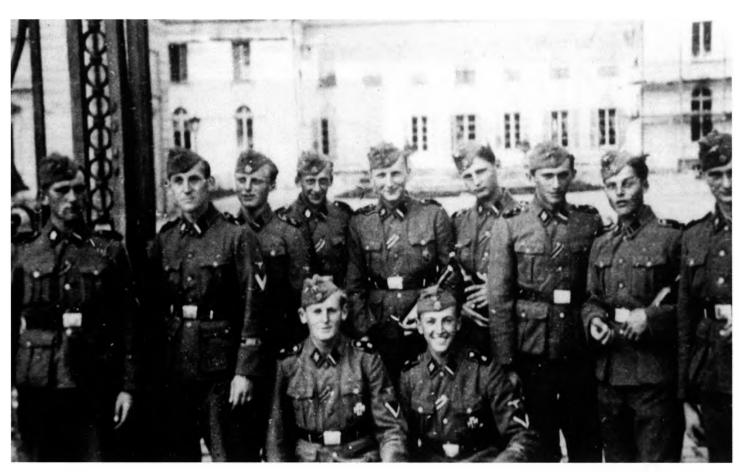
SS-Obersturmführer Paul Guhl became commander of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie in the fall of 1942.



SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, Peiper's battalion adjutant.



The reorganization of the Leibstandarte in September 1942 in France. Platoon headquarters section from the 11./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 with platoon leader SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Babick (on the right).



Noncommissioned officer course in 1942 in France. Men of the 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. First row: Übler and Heisig. Second row: Mundinger, Greif, Kampwart, Jentzsch, Gaul, Spindler, Otto, Rademacher and Bohlmann.



13. (gep.) Kompanie: SS-Sturmmann Wilhelm Marschall (on the left).



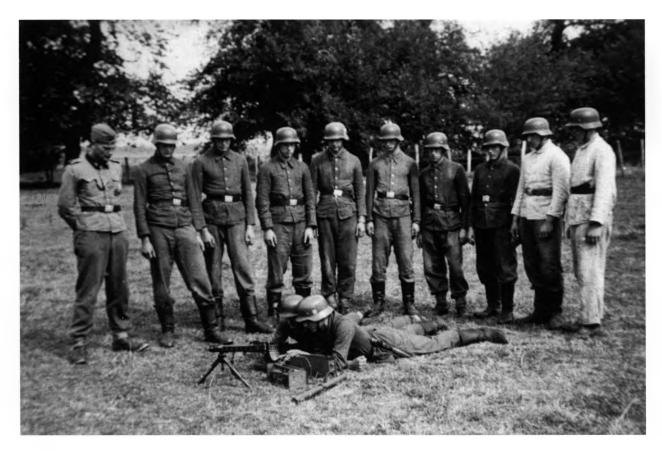
SS-Untersturmführer Babick and SS-Unterscharführer Schirmag in Chaise-Dieu (France), the billeting area for the 11. (gep.) Kompanie in the fall of 1942.



The Schützenpanzer (SPW) arrived in November 1942, and the III./SS-Panzer-Regiment-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Hauptsturmführer Jochen Peiper was fully equipped with them. Pictured here is a 3-ton SPW in the 12. (gep.) Kompanie. Its tactical sign can be seen on the left-front of the vehicle.



Drivers' training with the new SPW in the fall of 1942. Here with the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie.



Machine-gun training for Shirmag's squad in the 11. (gep.) Kompanie. From the left: Schirmag, Wrede, Stadler, Janzen, Geradt, Schöbel, Scheffen, Karg, Thier, Ahrens, Woite and Lembke on the machine gun.



Salzmann, Thier, Freyer from the 11. (gep.) Kompanie in Chaise Dieu.



The Chateau in Chaise Dieu where the 11. (gep.) Kompanie was billeted in 1942.



SS-Haupsturmführer Paul Guhl, commander of the 11./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 from the fall of 1942 to the winter of 1943.



SS-Panzergrenadier Heini Glenewinkel (13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2).



 $SS-Untersturm f\"uhrer\ Heinz\ Tomhardt\ and\ his\ platoon\ (13.\ (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment\ 2).$ 



SPW drivers' training at Verneuil, (14. (s. gep.) Kompanie).



SPW of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie.



SS-Untersturmführer Hans Schmidt in the 12. (gep.) Kompanie.



Kuschel, Knöfel and Kins of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie during SPW training.



SS-Oberscharführer Fritz Böcker, Spieß in the 11. (gep.) Kompanie.



Erwin Wrede, in this picture a SS-Oberschütze in the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, was killed in action as a SS-Rottenführer in March 1943.



Kurt Rieger, SS-Unterscharführer, platoon medic in the 2nd platoon of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Panzergrenadier Hans Brautsch, 3rd Squad, 2nd Platoon of the 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



The 3rd Squad of the 2nd Platoon of the 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. The squad leader, SS-Unterscharführer Rudi Knobloch, is on the right. He was later awarded the Close Combat Badge in Gold.



The platoon leaders of the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in Tillières. From the left: SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Thumeyer, Georg Preuß, Heinz Tomhardt and SS-Hauptscharführer Alfred Martin.



SS-Unterscharführer Martin Säuberlich's squad of the 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Standing from the left: Winter, Laager, Hentschel, Braune, Ladner, Evert, Schönberg and Neubrand. Sitting, from the left: Keck, Säuberlich and Paliga.



Knöfel and Appel of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie during training.



On 1 November 1942 a sports competition for the SPW-Bataillon took place in Verneuil. SS-Hauptsturmführer Jochen Peiper addresses the participants and audience over the microphone. His adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, is on the left.



Field training with the 13. (gep.) Kompanie; SS-Untersturmführer Wolfgang Pfitzner in the center.



SS-Unterscharführer Bast's squad in the school yard at Verneuil in December 1942. From the left: Quarthammer, Bast, Meyer, Franke, unknown, Lambert and Balz.



Rifle practice for officers. Here SS-Obersturmführer Otto Pinter (commander of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie) and on the left, SS-Obersturmführer Paul Guhl, (11. (gep.) Kompanie).



The commander of the 13. (gep.) Company, SS-Obersturmführer Otto Pinter, who had been a platoon leader in Peiper's company in 1941.



Bataillon officers as spectators. From the right: Peiper, Dinse, Bormann and Pinter.



The commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Jochen Peiper.



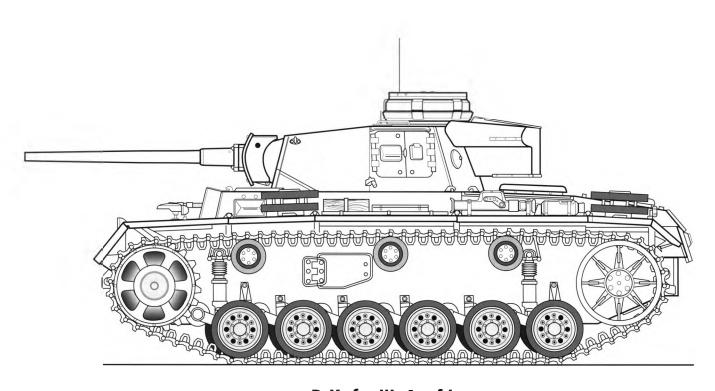
SS-Obersturmführer Pinter, SS-Hauptsturmführer Bormann and SS-Hauptsturmführer Rolf Kolitz (commander of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie).

The best singers were sought. Jochen Peiper (on the left) with First Sergeant Adolf Schall and the 13. (gep.) Kompanie.





The victorious team from the 15-kilometer forced march on 1 November 1942: 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. SS-Unterscharführer Kurt Israel (fourth from the left) became the SPW driver and orderly for company commander Guhl in 1943.



**PzKpfw III, Ausf L** Courtesy of George Bradford

# In Action at Kharkov: 27 January to 29 March 1943

Elements of the III. (gep.)/Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH entrained at the Argentan railway station. The 13. Kompanie was loaded there on 27 January 1943, while the 59 vehicles of the 14. Kompanie were loaded on 31 January 1943 in Verneuil. The transport trains took a route through Rouen – Amiens – Arras – Osnabrück – Hanover – Lehrte – Ludwigslust – Königsberg – Elbing – Eitkau – Wirballen – Vilna – Minsk – Gomel. In one of the trains, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie wrote during the trip:

We were going through Vilna. So we were turning south. We were in Russia. It almost felt like coming home. I wonder why? Could it be the eternal Drang nach Osten (push to the east)? Or because there was still deep snow there? Or because combat was still our life here? That's it. The west was too civilized. Life was too easy. Here you had to be a man again. In the evening we reached Minsk. Kursk was supposed to be in Russian hands. Increasing danger of partisan action. The train crew told stories of blown-up trains, burned out cars, etc. We were supposed to evacuate the first car because of possible mines. Naturally we didn't do it. In any case, I had my submachine gun brought to me

6 February 1943. In Gomel we heard that the train traveling in front of us really did hit a mine. There was a train next to us with Tigers of the LAH. In any case, we all rolled out. We were to be unloaded east of Kharkov. We all expected this to be the decisive year of the war in Russia ... Hopefully, winter will end soon, so that we can begin to fight." <sup>3</sup>

SS-Sturmmann Kuno Balz of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie recalled the long trip:

While on the train trip between France and Russia, we had to take some Hungarian soldiers along with us at one stop. While we traveled in fully loaded 3rd class coaches, they had to ride on the flat cars with the SPW. Each squad had to detail one man for its SPW, who was to watch and make sure that the Hungarians didn't swipe anything. Naturally, it was very cold in back in the SPW. The comrade who had been detailed to the SPW wanted to warm up a bit and turned on the blowtorch. While getting it ready, he must have spilled gas in the SPW, and the SPW started to burn. As it was nighttime, we were pulled out of our compartments to put the fire out. As we were in the middle of a Russian winter and there was no water, we had to shovel snow into the SPW. The SPW was full of snow but continued to burn. Suddenly there was an explosion, and we hit the dirt. This is what happened. A magnetic antitank mine detonated and fatally wounded our comrade Franke from our squad. The train crew uncoupled the car our SPW was loaded on and our trip continued once the train had been reassembled after a delay of two hours. We took our dead man, Franke, with us. He was placed on a board under an SPW and, after we reached the detraining station, we laid him on the squad bench of an SPW.4

This accident happened on 5 February 1943 at Ljubotin.<sup>5</sup>

The first mission for the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" was to offload southeast of Kharkov and provide security for the Donez sector between Smijew and Chotomlja. On 28 January 1943 the first elements of the division arrived in Tschugujew and were immediately led into position in the reconnoitered areas. The Leibstandarte was attached to the SS-Panzer-Korps commanded by SS-Obergruppenführer Hausser. An attack planed for the entire corps was pre-empted by the rapid Soviet advance. There were large gaps in the frontlines to the east of Kharkov, and the corps itself was in danger. The elements of the Leibstandarte which had already arrived began to fortify those positions, whereby Russian

civilians helped. On 31 January 1943 the German 6. Armee surrendered in Stalingrad.

The first elements of Peiper's SPW-Bataillon arrived at the Eastern Front on 2 February 1943 but did not offload as a unit. The 12. (gep.) Kompanie reached the front on 7 February, the 13. (gep.) Kompanie detrained in Snijew on 6 February, and the 11. (gep.) also detrained there. The 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, however, was unloaded west of Kharkov in snow and rain during the night of 8 February.

On 2 February 1943 the available elements of the I. and III. Bataillone of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 were ordered to build positions. The temperature read 31 degrees below zero. The regimental order for 3 February 1943 gave an estimate of the enemy situation:

Numerically superior enemy forces have broken through the defensive lines on the Don with massed artillery and tanks and are pushing forward to the west. The exact axis of their attack is not yet known. Forward enemy elements reached Petschenegi at 1330 on 3 February 1943. It is expected that the advance will continue and that they will reach the Kubjansk-Tschugujew Road during the night of 3 to 4 February.9

SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, under the command of SS-Standartenführer Theodor Wisch, prepared its defense in the following order (from left to right): II. Bataillon, III. (gep.) Bataillon and I. Bataillon. The boundary between the III. (gep.) and the II Bataillone was the forester's house, Skripai-Sadeschenko Blagodatnaja and that with the I. Bataillon was the ravine on the east edge of Skripai. On the evening of 4 February the available elements of Peiper's SPW battalion and the combat engineer platoon were dug in on a main battle line on the east edge of Skripai. <sup>10</sup>

The following instructions were issued in the regimental order for 3 February 1943:

The III. Bataillon, less one company, and with the attached 3.7 cm flak platoon, will defend its assigned sector and carry out combat reconnaissance against Blagodatnoje on 5 February 1943. The 11. Kompanie, reinforced by a platoon of 7.5 cm antitank guns, will move to the east edge of Balakleja in case of an enemy advance across the line Isjum-Kunie, and establish itself so that it can delay any enemy advance toward our positions."

After midnight on 6 February 1943 a Soviet attack in company strength on Peiper's SPW-Bataillon in Skripai was repulsed. The 13. (gep.) Kompanie was offloaded that same day in Smijew and immediately thrown into action in Skripai. The 11. (gep.) Kompanie advanced with the 3./SS-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung to Andrejewka and reported the place clear of the enemy at 1215.

German casualties (officer/noncommissioned officers/enlisted):

Dead: -/-/6 Wounded 1/-/47 Missing -/-/4

The wounded officer was SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Thumeyer of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie. Captured: 2 light machine guns, a mortar, and an antitank gun.<sup>13</sup>

The other units of the Leibstandarte were also defending themselves against the continuous enemy attacks. The "Das Reich" Division to the left of the Leibstandarte was outflanked to the north and the LAH to the south. Contact with the 320. Infanterie-Division – which had been beaten back along the Isjum-Smijew Road – had to be made. The division then had to moved to the right flank in order to extend friendly lines to the south. On 7 February 1943 the division ordered Andrejewka to be held, as the 320. Infanterie-Division was regrouping 30 kilometers away and intended to break through at Balakleja to the

# Bataillon Command Positions During the Operation at Kharkov (February 1943)

## III. (gep.)/ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2

Commander

SS-Stubaf. Jochen Peiper

Adjutant

SS-Ostuf. Otto Dinse

Orderly

SS-Ustuf. Rudolf Möhrlin

Signal Officer

SS-Ustuf Hans Mahneke

Special Duty Officers

SS-Hstuf. Georg Bormann and

SS-Stubaf Dr. Ludwig Stumpfegger

#### 11. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commander

SS-Hstuf. Paul Guhl

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ustuf Rudi Wetzel (WIA: 8 February 1943)

SS-Ustuf Dr. Karl Döring (WIA: 15 February 1943)

SS-Ustuf Werner Wolff

SS-Ustuf Heinz Hansel (KIA: 8 February 1943)

Special Duty Officer: SS-Ustuf. Walter Kern

#### 12. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commanders

SS-Ostuf. Lucas Westrup (KIA: 24 February 1943)

SS-Hstuf Georg Bormann (WIA: 20 March 1943)

SS-Ustuf Gerhard Babick

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ustuf Hans Schmidt

SS-Ustuf Dieter Kohler

SS-Ustuf Gerhard Babick

SS-Ustuf Otto Bölck

### February 1943

Surgeon

SS-Hstuf, Dr. Robert Brüstle

Assistant Surgeon

SS-Ustuf. Dr. Friedrich Breme

Transportation Company Commander

SS-Ustuf Wilhelm Ratschko

Maintenance Company Commander

SS-Ustuf Alfred Bloch

Administrative Officer

SS-Hstuf. Herbert Molt

Translator

SS-Ustuf. Walter Kern

#### 13. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commanders

SS-Ostuf. Otto Pinter (WIA: 2 January 1943)

SS-Ustuf Heinz Tomhardt

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ustuf Georg Preuß

SS-Ustuf Heinz Tomhardt (WIA: 13 March 1943)

SS-Ustuf Kurt Thumeyer (WIA: 6 February 1943)

SS-Ustuf Joachim Kaden (WIA: 13 March 1943)

Special Duty Officer: SS-Ustuf. Wolfgang Pfitzer

#### 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Hstuf. Rolf Kolitz

Infantry Gun Platoon Leader: SS-Ustuf Erhard Noth

Cannon Platoon Leader: SS-Ustuf Erhard Gührs

Antitank Platoon Leader:

SS-Ustuf David Margait (KIA: 13 April 1943)

Combat Engineer Platoon Leader:

SS-Oscha. Wilhelm Haferstroh (WIA: 13 March 1943)

Antitank Rifle Squad:

SS-Hscha. Jochen Thiele

Leibstandarte. There is a comment in the war diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2:

At 1230 strong enemy infantry forces were reported seven kilometers east of Andrejewka by Guhl's unit (author: 11.(gep.)/III. Bataillon) ... 1500: Two strong enemy columns moving from the northeast and southeast toward Andrejewka. The 12. Kompanie, arriving from the train station where it was offloaded, was sent to Liman as reinforcements. 2230: Report from Guhl's unit concerning the scattering of an enemy squadron. 2300 hours: Guhl's unit requests reinforcements. 14

SS-Obersturmführer Guhl's radio message said: "2200: Send reinforcements immediately. Bring ammunition, rations and fuel. Be careful of the Smijew-Andrejewka Road. Enemy probably to the south." <sup>15</sup>

Peiper's 12. (gep.) and 13. (gep.) Kompanien, reinforced with assault guns from SS-Hauptsturmführer Rettlingers' 3. Batterie, retook the rapidly abandoned Andrejewka on this day. The fighting in Andrejewka on 7 February 1943 was the first confirmed

day of close combat for the 11. and 12. (gep.) Kompanien. During the night of 7 February 1943 the Kampfgruppe destroyed a T-34. SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff's SPW broke down. Wolff was platoon leader of the 3. Zug of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie. His company reported the capture of a T-34, an artillery piece, an antitank gun, two mortars and 100 horses.

On the morning of 8 February 1943 the Russians attacked along the entire main battle line of the division. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2's war diary reported:

At 1235 hours Kampfgruppe Guhl reported that only the western point of Andrejewka was still in our hands. The road to Georgijewski was being kept open. The Kampfgruppe was under heavy artillery fire and was being attacked by tanks on three sides. The Kampfgruppe was ordered to withdraw to Liman and reinforce the left flank of the II. Bataillon as far as Donez.

On this day SS-Sturmmann Heinz Glenewinkel of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie noted only two words in his diary, "Close Combat". 8 February 1943 in Skripai was designated a confirmed close-com-

bat day for the 11., 12., and 13. (gep.) Kompanien and the battalion staff. Paul Guhl of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer effective 30 January1943. The leader of his heavy weapons platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Hansel, was killed in action, and the leader of the 1st Platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Rudi Wetzel, was wounded. 16

SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, platoon leader of the 3. Zug of the 11. Kompanie, destroyed a Russian T-34 with the 3.7 cm antitank gun mounted on his SPW. SS-Rottenführer Heinz Freyer recalled:

We made an armored attack across hills and ravines and smoked out Russian foxholes. Even Kern jumped down from his SPW and opened fire with his submachine gun. There was a gully in front of us and a hill behind, where there were two T-34's, but they didn't shoot at us. Wolff fired and must have hit a gas can but, in any case, one of the T-34's burst into flame. The range was about 1000 meters. The hit was certainly pure luck.<sup>17</sup>

By Kern, he meant SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern. The 37-year-old from Baku in Russia – an SS-Obersturmbannführer on the staff at the Main Office of the SS since 1937 – rode along in one of the SPW of the 3. Zug but was not a squad leader. He was used as an interpreter. 18

SS-Unterscharführer Zimmerman of the heavy weapons platoon of the 11. Kompanie lost his SPW in action and his driver, Johannes Bräuer, joined another squad. He froze both feet, since as an SPW driver he had leather boots instead of felt ones. <sup>19</sup> The men lived and fought at temperatures of minus 28 degrees. <sup>20</sup>

The 320. Infanterie-Division was completely isolated and was fighting east of Balakleja to cover the Leibstandarte's right flank. There were still 40 kilometers between it and the Leibstandarte's south flank. In Merefa a Kampfgruppe was formed from the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and SS-Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 of the "Das Reich" Division. It was intended to hit the Soviets in the flank on 9 February.

In the meantime, it could easily be seen that the Soviets intended the operational encirclement of Kharkov and, in addition, intended to advance to the Donez Basin to cut off the German front lines along the Mius from their supplies and then wipe them out. This would have meant that Manstein's Heeresgruppe Süd would have lost most of its rearward lines of communication. This would have put the Eastern Front in great peril.

The 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie of the SPW-Bataillon was still in transit on the train. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs wrote:

A road ran along to the right of the tracks. Columns were marching back. It must have looked like that in Napoleon's time. They were Italians. At noon there were beans and, as we were about to start in, Meier II (translator: the second man named Meier in the company) came up and showed me his soup with maggots swimming in it. I lost my appetite. I went out on the road. Crazy rumors were flying around – Kharkov abandoned, back to Bachinatsch, etc. Oh well, in any event, we were moving forward. <sup>21</sup>

The war diaries record: "9 February 1943. Guhl's unit is to stay in Liman to establish contact with the 320. Infanterie-Division. 1245: Guhl's unit is ordered to evacuate Liman and move to Smijew". The 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie of the SPW-Bataillon was detrained on the evening of 8 February 1943 and, on 9 February, its vehicles rolled through the middle of the withdrawing German and other troops coming from Kharkov to Smijew. It reached the battalion at 1400, when it immediately went into action. SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs commented on the critical situation in his diary: "A Luftwaffe Oberleutnant shook my hand and told me how glad they were that we were there ... The Russians are attacking vigorously along the entire

front. The battalion is holding a sector of nine kilometers".24

The first operations of his SPW-Bataillon were described in the recommendation for the German Cross in Gold for Jochen Peiper:

The III. Bataillon of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 of the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, under the command of the SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper, was immediately thrown into combat as it was detrained at the Kharkov railroad station. Initially it was ordered to establish a strong point in Andrejewka in front of the division's right wing and a fall-back position for the 320. Infanterie-Division. Peiper carried out this mission and on 7 February 1943 was surrounded by strong Russian forces (two rifle regiments and a tank brigade). After holding on to the strong point for two days, Peiper broke his battalion out of the ring and pulled back to the main battle line. While carrying out his mission, he inflicted heavy, bloody casualties on the enemy and destroyed two T-34 tanks. Peiper distinguished himself during this action by his skillful leadership and great personal bravery.<sup>25</sup>

During the night before 10 February 1943 the entire SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH occupied a new main battle line. Peiper's battalion was placed in reserve in Podolchow. Kampfgruppe Linden relieved the 13. (gep.) Kompanie of Peiper's battalion on 10 February. The Panzergrenadiere suffered from the icy cold. Bread and butter were frozen solid. The men white-washed their SPW for camouflage.

10 February 1943, 1430: the 13. (gep.) Kompanie received orders to close the gap between the left flank of the I. Bataillon and the right flank of the II./ Regiment 1. One platoon of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie was attached for the mission. At1700 hours the enemy attacked Lisogubowka in company strength and was repulsed in a counterattack by a platoon of the 12. Kompanie. Mission for Bataillon Peiper: With two platoons of assault guns attached, break through to Smijew during the night of 10 and 11 February with an ambulance column of 60 vehicles, make contact with the 320. Infanterie-Division there, and ensure the evacuation of the wounded of the 320. Infanterie-Division.<sup>26</sup>

The platoon leader of the three 7.5 cm gun SPW of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, wrote:

Warning order for "Operation Peiper". We are to cross the Donez during the night, forcibly penetrate the Russian main lines, and move 25 kilometers into enemy territory in order to pull out "Herz" ("Heart") Division. There are 10,000 men and 1,500 wounded. A crazy plan but one after the hearts of our Panzergrenadiere. Seven assault guns are attached to our battalion. My gun traveled the rear point. It is 1600 hours. I get everything ready and put my affairs in order. I wonder if I should give Rosin my diary so that it might at least get home? Jacobi reports that his gun has to go 140 kilometers back to Poltawa for repair. Now I only have one other one. I haven't heard anything from the ammunition resupply carrier. In the evening we will receive satchel charges, hand grenades, etc.<sup>27</sup>

The SPW-Bataillon was in Podolchow. Peiper was making careful preparations for the difficult operation of establishing contact with the 320. Infanterie-Division moving through Russian territory.

12 February 1943, 0430: We launched Operation Peiper. Destroyed enemy forces on the Krassnaja Poljana Road and cleared the road for the ambulance column. Late-arriving elements of the column were fired on by the enemy and six of our trucks destroyed. 0640: Operation Peiper reached Smijew without further contact with the enemy. 0800: Operation Peiper instructed to scout to Liman and establish contact with the 320. Infanterie-Division. 1400: Contact established. Operation Peiper provided security during the night for the assembly area of the

320. Infanterie-Division at Tsctheremuschnaja – Sidki – Samostje – Butowka.<sup>28</sup>

After making contact with the division, Peiper sent SS-Untersturmführer Gührs as liaison officer to the commander of the 320. Infanterie-Division, General Postel. "The division looked terrible, it was all unbelievable ..." he remembered.<sup>29</sup>

13 February: Blowing snow. In the early morning, Bataillon Peiper left Sidki and reached Wodjanoje at 1150. The enemy had set fire to the bridge which was on the enemy side and thus hoped to cut off Bataillon Peiper's withdrawal. The III. Bataillon cleared the enemy out of Krassnaja Poljana and drove him east. A platoon of the 2. Kompanie advanced to the west of Krassnaja Poljana, and held the west flank open so that the wounded could cross. The bridge was repaired. By 1630 all the trucks with the wounded had made it behind our main lines. Bataillon Peiper was ordered to move to Merefa as a divisional reserve.<sup>30</sup>

Supplementing the modest accounts in the official war diary, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs described that day:

"The transport for the wounded was assembled. We were to fight a way through for them again. There was hard fighting at Wodjanje with a Russian ski battalion. By evening we had really cleaned them out. Crossing. My gun had fired 42 shells. We have six dead. By 1900 every element had made it through".<sup>31</sup>

Jochen Peiper himself made a report concerning his mission to rescue the badly battered 320. Infanterie-Division and its numerous wounded:

The III.(gep.)/Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LAH received the mission to cross our main lines and advance to Smijew in order to pick up the remnants of the 320. Infanterie-Division and evacuate its almost 1500 wounded men. For that purpose the battalion was given all available ambulances, as well as considerable empty supply transport. Our main lines lay along a creek (Udy), with a long wooden bridge over it. On the other side was a weakly occupied village (Krassnaja Poljana). Against our expectations we arrived at Smijew without encountering any noteworthy enemy resistance. At Smijew there was a river (Donez). We waited for the approaching point units of Postel (commander of the 320. Infanterie-Division). A little later General Postel appeared with a large vehicle and entourage of officers. At first I was asked why we hadn't crossed the river. A reference to the weak ice which wouldn't bear our weight was swept aside, but then, at almost the same moment, an orderly officer confirmed it. He reported: "Herr General, the ice won't hold, the first assault gun has already broken through,'

General Postel was in very good spirits. He stated he would take up quarters there and we would provide his security. He became very upset that the main lines were so far away. Then he disappeared.

After a long pause, the division arrived. We had spent the time with an uncomfortable feeling, sitting silently on our SPW. We all had the same impression: Beresina! Napoleon's retreat must have looked like this. Those capable of walking in the front, then the walking wounded and, at the end, the badly wounded. A train of misery on sleds and carts. As these were overloaded, some of the unlucky ones were tied to them and pulled along on their stomachs. In the meantime our surgeons and medics had made arrangements for emergency medical treatment. The wounded first got something to eat, hot drinks and first aid. I still remember our battalion surgeon, Dr. Brüstle, complaining to me the next morning. He and his assistant had been operating all night long (especially on frostbite), and no one from the 320. Infanterie-Division had helped. We went on guard and stared into the spooky night, hollow-cheeked, convinced this wasn't going to last. The next day (13 February) we started the endlessly long column

moving. The division with all of its wounded on the road, and we with the fighting elements deployed along both sides as flank protection.

When we finally arrived at the creek with the long wooden bridge, it consisted only of smoldering piles. A Russian snowshoe battalion had occupied the village and had massacred and mutilated numerous German drivers and medics (stragglers from the previous day). It fired on the column from all sides. My battalion took the village after heavy house-to-house fighting, established a bridgehead, and pulled our rescued comrades across the ice and the bridge – temporarily rebuilt – to safety. As the last vehicle reached the opposite bank safely, my SPW battalion turned and drove back to Smijew in order to reach our lines again in a long sideways sneak behind the Russian lines.

According to General Postel's account, he hadn't had to put up a "continuous battle to break through" but was marching relatively unmolested right along behind the Russians. What made the situation critical, however, was the rapidly shrinking mobility, the increasing burden of those no longer able to keep going on their own, and the crisis in morale, resulting from rumors that they weren't getting closer to the German front which was continually moving further back.<sup>31</sup>

SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, commander of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, recalled that General Postel's arrogant appearance – he was still wearing his white detachable collar – in comparison to the ragged, dead-tired Landser of his division, moved him deeply.32 SS-Untersturmführer Rudolf von Ribbentrop of the Panzer-Regiment of the Leibstandarte added detail:

It was unforgettable, the cool, sometimes almost blasé, manner in which Peiper could make his reports. And this is how he described making contact with the commander of the 320. Infanterie-Division in February of 1943. The division crossed the Donez after Peiper had driven a long way through the Russians to give them a hand. When it was reported to the commander, General Postel, that they had lost contact with the rear guard of his division, he was undisturbed and in icy-cold tones only declared that it was stated in the "Aunt Frieda" (this was a term for Army Service Regulation No. 300: Unit Leadership), that the rear guard had to sacrifice itself if necessary! Peiper had an appropriate opinion of this general.<sup>33</sup>

This operation – so successfully executed by Peiper – was also given its just due in his recommendation for the award of the German Cross in Gold:

After pulling back the defense sector along the general lines of Rogan – Lisogubowka – Mirgorod, Peiper was ordered to take Smijew with his battalion and make contact with the 320. Infanterie-Division. Peiper carried out this mission and brought back 750 wounded from the 320. Infanterie-Division. While doing so he completely destroyed an enemy snowshoe battalion which blocked his way back.<sup>34</sup>

On 14 February 1943 the entire III. (gep.) Bataillon, including its SPW, vehicles, and trains, began a withdrawal to Merefa through the large city of Kharkov which was on fire in some parts. The 14. Kompanie reached the trains at 0300 hours and passed through Kharkov at 0700 hours. In the evening it had to return to Kharkov in order to push out Soviet forces which had broken through.<sup>35</sup> In Merefa the men of the SPW-Bataillon dropped into deep sleep. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs wrote:

"15 February 1943. Tonight we could finally get some sleep again. After 96 hours". $^{36}$ 

Jochen Peiper's SPW-Bataillon distinguished itself by its outstanding aggressiveness right from the first time it went into action. Its speed and the skillful use of its heavy firepower under the resourceful leadership of its commander had forged it into a sharp, effective weapon. Jochen Peiper, who was somewhat smaller than many of his grenadiers, was able to get the most out of himself in action and participated in every attack in his SPW. He had breathed new spirit into his SPW-Bataillon and Hauptsturmführer Guhl's quote: "The battalion's determination was our guarantee of success", was certainly generally true.<sup>37</sup>

The very demanding tactical leadership of an SPW-Bataillon can only be supplied from the front and not from a command post back in the rear.<sup>38</sup> When in action, the commander, Peiper, had to continuously evaluate the situation from up in front and make rapid decisions as to where pressing the attack would offer the greatest chances of success and where inviting weak points in the enemy's defenses could be successfully exploited. He had to deal with continuously changing combat situations every day. His SPW crews consisted of young Panzergrenadiere who matured into highly valuable, flexible fighters in the fire of the Eastern Front, led by experienced noncommissioned officers and aggressive officers.

As a matter of principle, the attacks were carried out mounted, which gave them the advantage of speed and mobile firepower. If problems should occur on the right-hand side of an attack sector, the SPW crews fired smoke to the right and pushed past on the left. Speed, surprise and the enormous effectiveness of the weapons in the SPW were the main elements for the successful employment of the SPW-Bataillon in the Leibstandarte.

Jochen Peiper wrote:

This SPW-Bataillon had made a name for itself in the night fighting in Russia and in the divisional and corps area was called the "Blow Torch Battalion" or the "Blow Torch Squadron". The SPW-Bataillon used to attack Russian villages like a cavalry unit: From all sides at full speed, firing everything we had. The thatch roofed houses always caught fire and added to the panic.<sup>39</sup>

At this point we ought to examine how the SPW were employed in action. In this regard, SS-Unterscharführer Günther Wagner of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie said:

The companies or platoons advanced on a broad front against the enemy positions. When a particular target was identified, we stopped to fire. After we had taken it out, we moved on. When we took antitank gun fire, we were radioed to dismount and fight as infantry. That meant that every SPW arched across the ground with its doors open, while the squad jumped out one at a time, so that the squad was deployed in depth facing the enemy. The SPW with its driver and radioman took up a position behind the squad, with the radioman manning the machine gun and providing cover. The heavy platoon had two SPW with machine guns permanently mounted and two SPW with 8 cm mortars. These were permanently mounted on base plates built into the SPW, and there was an extra base plate for use outside the vehicle. This heavy platoon gave covering fire from the rear, the mortars whenever possible from covered firing positions – hay stacks, cottages, etc. At that time I was a squad leader with two mortar SPW.40

"15 February 1943, 0710 hours. Bataillon Peiper ordered to pass through Kharkov and attack Ossnova from the north" This attack was carried out at the request of the "Das Reich" Division. It pushed forward to Ossnova where an SPW was put out of action by a Molotov cocktail.

The leader of the cannon platoon of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, wrote:

At noon we attacked five companies south of Kharkov. Another carrier lost. Neumann dead ... several wounded. In the evening I provided cover at the same place with the 13. Kompanie. Kharkov was to be abandoned. We were to pull back in the morning twilight. It was going to be another sleepless night. The battalion has to cover a sector of 40 kilometers.

Kampfgruppe Witt had encircled a Russian army which was trying to keep itself from being wiped out. When we laid down fire with the mortars, the Russians tried to advance at top speed. Our answer, "we're waiting for you".<sup>42</sup>

The action at Ossnova meant another day of close combat for staff and the 11., 13., and 14. Kompanien. SS-Sturmmann Fritz ("Schnucki") Lembke of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie was mortally wounded at Ossnova. His comrade Erich Schöbel was nearby: "We put him on an open engine cover on the SPW and loosened his clothing. Then we saw the bad news: lodged bullet in the stomach with internal bleeding. He died in my arms". 43

During the fighting at night the efforts to clear the enemy forces out of this suburb of Kharkov were unsuccessful. They were being reinforced constantly. With the agreement of both operations officers from the divisions, LAH and "Das Reich", the SPW-Bataillon was halted. On this day, SS-Unterscharführer Günther Wagner of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie experienced the following:

The SPW-Bataillon pushed into the suburbs of Kharkov to perform its mission of covering Army units and ensuring the most orderly withdrawal possible. We were on a road with a railroad embankment, with the SPW behind it and the soldiers on it. Suddenly, at about 400 to 500 meters range, an ambulance and a motorcycle with sidecar, both with the insignia of the Red Cross, came toward the opening to the overpass at high speed. At this moment both vehicles were fired on from the surrounding houses. They came to a stop about 200 meters from the embankment and safety. I don't think any orders were needed. The mounted crews drove into the village at top speed and wiped out the enemy.<sup>44</sup>

This is just one more of the numerous instances experienced of deliberate Soviet contravention of the Geneva Convention and the Hague Rules of Land Warfare. The war with the Soviet enemy exceeded the previous norms, which had been observed by the western enemies. The Russians, however, didn't consider themselves bound by agreements of international law, even for wounded and prisoners of war. German Landser often found massacred and mutilated comrades who had fallen wounded into Russian hands during their further advances. Because of these gruesome experiences, German soldiers had a constant subliminal fear of falling into Russian hands as prisoners.

"Close combat. Ossnova-Kharkov Tractor Factory. Last battalion to leave Kharkov," wrote SS-Sturmmann Glenewinkel of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie in his diary of 15 February 1943. The platoon leader of the 2. Zug of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Karl Döring, was severely wounded on that day. SS-Sturmmann Erich Schöbel of the 11. Kompanie relates: "I was Obersturmführer Döring's runner during the fighting for Kharkov. During his absence I discovered spirits in his officer's footlocker. I emptied a half bottle of sherry-brandy. I slept off the following drunk in an open SPW at 10 degrees below zero without any ill effects. But you needed something like that once in a while to stand up to those hard conditions."

All elements of the companies – and the entire division as well – were affected by these extraordinarily hard exertions and adverse environment.

On 15 February 1943 the Soviets pushed into the northwestern section of Kharkov. At 1240 hours Korps Raus radioed that the city could be held no longer and that those units still in Kharkov would be wiped out if they were not immediately pulled back. In this critical situation the commanding general of the SS-Panzer-Korps, SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, made his difficult decision to abandon Kharkov against the Führer's orders, in order to prevent the destruction of those elements still within the city. He moved the lines back behind the Udy River. With that, the city

of Kharkov was abandoned by German troops.

On 16 February 1943 SS-Untersturmführer Gührs wrote:

At 0400 hours we pulled back from the enemy. The streets were blocked, and progress was slow. Toward midday we were in Komarowka. On the way we met up with portions of the trains. The main body was scattered. Kahlenberg was dead. I looked at him, He had been shot in the head. Poor guy. It affected me a lot. Where could Otto Rosin be? He commanded the trains. We stayed at Komarowka. We were the operational reserve.<sup>47</sup>

At noon on 16 February 1943 Peiper radioed that his battalion was in Komarowka. On the following day the SPW-Bataillon launched a counterattack against a Soviet advance on Merefa south of Udy.

On 17 February the SPW-Bataillon was ordered to halt the enemy forces which had attacked at night at Kolessnikow and were pushing forward through the Msha Valley and then, on the morning of 18 February, it was ordered to take Ziglerowka. Elements of the battalion staff and the 12. Kompanie were fighting at Babai. On 18 February 1943 SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 returned to the control of the Leibstandarte. During the night Peiper's SPW-Bataillon moved 60 kilometers, and it started to thaw. On 19 February 1943 the battalion was in ready positions in Krassnograd. The Infantry Gun Platoon of the 14. Kompanie had been partially scattered, and the 11. Kompanie had at least 15 dead.<sup>48</sup>

19 February 1943, 0400 hours. Reconnaissance to the south of the units employed. Reconnaissance reports Ziglerowka occupied by the enemy. 13. (gep.) Kompanie ordered to take Ziglerowka immediately. After its capture, the right flank is to extend the main lines to the south edge of Ziglerowka. At 1400 hours the 13. Kompanie started its attack on Ziglerowka from the north. Elements of the 4. Kompanie and 2. Kompanie advanced from Djatschkowka to the west edge of Bereskowka, went into attack positions in a small woods, and attacked Ziglerowka with the 13. Kompanie. The rest of the Bataillon Peiper was ordered to advance to Jeremejewka on two roads and from there provide cover to the south. The western Kampfgruppe was to establish contact with the 13. Kompanie. 1650 hours: Kompanie Pinter (13. Kompanie) was in Ziglerowka after breaking stubborn enemy resistance. It pushed out enemy forces who vainly tried to hang on to Hills 153.4 and 167.9. 2230 hours: Bataillon Peiper launched another attack and reached Kasatchiji – Maidan at 0045 hours.49

The cannon platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, wrote:

A motorcycle messenger arrived suddenly with an order to attack. It was 1400 hours. Our batallion was to carry out an attack to make it possible to advance the main battle lines as ordered by the Führer. I participated in the attack with 12. Kompanie on the platoon's first vehicle. At 1800 hours we reached our attack positions. The thrust through the enemy lines went surprisingly well. It was a moonlit night. We proceeded cautiously. I experienced my first night attack. At 2330 hours we were in front of our first objective. A village defended by the Russians. The battalion deployed. I was on the right flank with my platoon. A beautiful picture lit up by the moon. At 800 meters range, the first shells exploded in the village. Two Russian guns attempted weak counterfire. Unstoppable, vehicle after vehicle pushed into the village. We were through it in an hour. It was just 0030 hours, according to my watch. The village was burning like a torch behind us.50

SS-Sturmmann Kuno Balz of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie remembers that attack:

"We were part of the night attack of the SPW-Bataillon, in

which we captured three villages. Our group also had to carry out reconnaissance that night in the SPW. Our SPW was put out of action by a hit from an antitank gun. Unterscharführer Kuscha was fatally wounded".<sup>51</sup>

SS-Sturmmann Heinz Glenewinkel was also on that SPW and noted in his diary: "Counterattack at night. Two direct hits from an antitank gun. Unterscharführer Kuscha killed; Rottenführer Türk and Rottenführer Paulsen wounded."

The SPW was taken to the panzer repair facility at Poltawa.52

Peiper had developed night attacks by his battalion as his particular specialty and was generally successful, especially since the element of surprise was on his side. SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl remembered:

"Night attacks were always successful because the enemy didn't expect an attack at night. This and speed guaranteed success." 53

20 February 1943. Bataillon Peiper prepared for attack on Jeremejewka in ready positions. Strong enemy forces with tanks in Jeremejewka. The speed of the attack suffered greatly because of snow drifts. 0630 hours: Jeremejewka and the Leninskij Factory taken. Enemy completely beaten. Bataillon Peiper provided cover to the south and southeast. 1000 hours: III. Bataillon is ordered to occupy Rossowachotnoje as well, to establish a forward base for the Aufklärungs-Abteilung.<sup>54</sup>

At 0902 hours Peiper had a radio message sent to the 2. Regiment: "0630 hours: Jeremejewka and the Leninskij Factory taken. Pushed another five kilometers to the east. Occupied and secured the villages taken. Enemy completely defeated and fleeing to the east-southeast".55

#### SS-Untersturmführer Gührs:

We assembled behind the village (Kasatschji Maidan). As it was getting light in the east, we attacked further to the east. Hardly anyone noticed the biting cold. Short preparations before the next village. There was supposed to be a Russian regiment with heavy weapons in it. Once again we launched an attack that left nothing to be desired for audacity. "Where the Leibstandarte fights, every enemy takes flight" we sang in France. Here it was the simple truth. Our SPW ground through the snow. The positions were overrun, and the enemy fled. We started in pursuit and we overtook them. The regiment was relentlessly destroyed by the Panzer-Grenadier-Bataillon of the Leibstandarte. We had long since advanced past our second objective when the SPW in front of me was suddenly taken out by an antitank gun hit from very close range. Unterscharführer Hesse was dead. At the same time we were also ordered to halt. The objective had been reached, two villages taken, a 20 kilometer advance made and a regiment destroyed along with its weapons. The village was secured.56

The destroyed SPW belonged to SS-Unterscharführer Eichler of the heavy machine gun squad of the 12. Kompanie. His driver Broska and SS-Rottenführer Kindler were wounded while Hesse and his radioman Klinger were killed.<sup>57</sup> The SPW was a total loss.

His leadership of this attack presented a further point in the recommendation for the award of the German Cross in Gold to Peiper:

While in Starowerowka the battalion was ordered to take Ziglerowka. The mission was carried out at night against strong enemy resistance; an enemy battalion was wiped out and four 7.62 cm guns, an infantry gun, 10 mortars, machine guns and numerous small arms were captured or destroyed. From there, Peiper advanced immediately to Katsatchiji Maidan and during his advance ran into an enemy battalion on the march which he immediately decided to attack. There too he inflicted high losses on the enemy and then occupied Katsatchiji Maidan. Peiper readied his battalion there for an attack on Jeremejewka. It attacked at daylight against strong enemy forces and took Jeremejewka.

Taking advantage of the enemy's confusion, the battalion advanced to Leninskij and broke the last Russian resistance. His pursuing battalion inflicted heavy casualties on enemy forces fleeing to the east over open fields. The battalion knocked out a T-34 tank and a light tank; it captured a T-34, six 7.62 cm guns and 300 horses. Three sleigh columns were destroyed.

The enemy's bloody losses amounted to 800-900 dead. SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper distinguished himself throughout this fighting by the skillful leadership of his battalion and personal bravery in the face of the enemy. He thereby showed himself worthy of the high distinction of the German Cross in Gold.<sup>58</sup>

The SPW-Bataillon was supposed to be relieved by I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 in Jeremejewka and then attached to SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1. Toward 1500 hours these units arrived in the village and it was turned into a strongpoint. At 1800 hours on this 20 February 1943 SS-Untersturmführer Gührs and a cannon vehicle were ordered to the battalion command post, where Peiper gave him the mission to keep a village clear with a small SPW Kampfgruppe. At 0300 hours the outposts were deployed in the village; the village itself was free of the enemy.<sup>59</sup>

"21 February 1943, 1300 hours. Mission for the III. Bataillon: Bridgehead at Krasnograd. III. Bataillon is attached to the division for that purpose." 60

The SPW-Bataillon reached Borki at 1600 hours, let the 1./ SS-Pionier-Bataillon 1 dismount there and pulled back to friendly lines during the morning of 22 February. SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, who had missed the operation, noted:

The orderly officer arrived at 0400 hours. I heard, half asleep, that we were to immediately saddle up, move back to the German lines, attack Russian forces which had broken into the positions of the 1. Regiment and destroy them. I brought my second gun along and had the munitions vehicle with me. We had to cover some 60 kilometers. The first gun broke down due to a broken drive sprocket. The second gun had to be zeroed again. The munitions vehicle also had to go to in for repairs. When we reached the battalion trains, I stayed there with my platoon. The battalion was to attack that night. At 1600 hours I sent Jacobi after the battalion. (Untersturmführer) David (Margit) had taken over the antitank gun platoon again today. Mewes' gun wouldn't be ready before 2400 hours.

22 February 1943: I still wanted to reach the battalion before the attack. In Nowaja Wodolaga I found nothing. So on to the command post of the 1. Regiment. Someone told me it was 22 kilometers further on. It was 0300 hours and completely dark. Columns were rolling past to the rear. What's that all about? I asked around. The regimental command post was supposed to be in Rjabuchino. Assault guns with mounted men were moving back. Then there was nothing more coming along at all. I had to find the battalion. So, on to the command post at top speed. I was outside Rjabuchino. Dead men were lying around. Ammunition, abandoned guns, destroyed vehicles, dead horses. Not a sound in the entire village, only the burning houses lit up the horrible scene. Armor tracks in the snow. I went on foot through the village with drawn pistol. Nothing! I assumed the battalion had attacked and had moved on. The village was evidence of that.

So, back to the SPW and continue on! I encountered nothing else. Past field positions. Russian antitank guns with dead crews along the way. A Russian tank on the right. It had certainly been destroyed already. I couldn't make out much in the darkness. After nine kilometers there was another village in front of me, with some houses burning.

It was 0400 hours. Suddenly an explosion. A cloud of smoke in the SPW and it landed on its left side. Machine gun fire rapped against the armor from very close range. I waited for the next round from the antitank gun and we dismounted to the right. We moved away from the SPW and hit the dirt. None of us were wounded. Unterscharführer Mewes, (Sturmmann) Siart, Krell, Eberhard, and I. We were five men with two pistols and we were facing antitank guns and machine guns. It was dark. Stay together and get away from the SPW. No one was wounded yet. The machine gun fired bursts over us. Eberhard seemed to be in shock. I pulled him next to me. I was remarkably calm. In any case I felt this wasn't the end for us. We went into the next village with cocked pistols. The place was called Borki, as I found out later. It was approaching 0500 hours. It got light. Borki also showed panzer tracks and the traces of fighting. Otherwise, nothing German. I went into a house with drawn pistol and asked if there were any Germans there. I'm told, they had been pulled out yesterday evening by assault guns. Then everything became clear. Our lines had been pulled back. We were behind enemy lines. By then it had become fully light. I had to try to reach the German lines with my men in one piece.

As I went back through the village, there were Russians already leaving the houses. I pulled my men into a hollow to avoid any contact with the enemy. The Russians wouldn't take any of us alive. That's for sure. We waded through the deep snow, far from the pathway. First I had to go to our SPW. Russians with sleds at the SPW. The antitank gun was now in front of it. Hit the dirt. They had seen us. They watched us too. I had to get away. We pretended that we were also Russians, and simply marched off. Two sleds approach. I changed direction and marched so that I had the sun at my back. The two sleds were no longer able to see me. We were then moving west. Going in this direction we had to eventually run into Germans. Mewes took point, and I covered the rear about 50 meters behind. Behind us, there were more Russians on the hills. There were individual riders and small detachments in the open. It was becoming tricky. If we could only reach the woods in front of us. A Russian ski battalion was advancing 800 meters to the left. Were they trying to cut us off? The chances for our escape were getting smaller. We were advancing ever more slowly. After three hours of laborious movement forward, we reached the road on which we encountered German vehicles the night before. We would certainly be through soon. Also, we couldn't see any more Russians. With this safer feeling, we made better progress. We continued to find abandoned positions. Everything was so strange.

Suddenly a German aircraft appeared over us. We could expect no help from him. I was first in line again. Suddenly someone behind me yelled "Bombs!"

The plane was dropping his bombs on us. No damage. Thank God. He came back again. We signaled. We went on. A sleigh column suddenly appeared 300 meters in front of us. I turned immediately to the left and moved in this new direction. They didn't seem to have seen us.

We took cover behind a snow drift. I looked over the top. Far to the left there seemed to be troops going into a firing line. So there were only two possibilities left. First: dig into the snow and try to break through at night or risk everything and march on behind those troops going by on our left. Fate helped me. My observation of them was detected. They detached a few men who approached. Things were right on edge. I thought of Gisela and our child. Things were so simple when you're looking death in the face. I saw everything very clearly. Two men were approaching me from the direction in which we had to go. No one will take us alive. And the enemy will die first. With two pistols, we could only defend ourselves for a few minutes. So first, straight on to the men. I looked through my binoculars, but saw little better and

gestured that in any case we had to get closer. We couldn't be identified as either Russians or Germans. However, everything ended well. When I approached, I found myself in front of Sturmbannführer Frey of the I. Bataillon.

By noon I was back at the battalion and I reported to Hauptsturmführer Kolitz. In the evening I went to report to the commander (author: Peiper). The mistake occurred when I wasn't stopped when I drove through our lines during the night. The front was moved back 20 kilometers during the night to shorten the lines. I sent the men who were with me to the rear area to draw new clothes and to rest.<sup>61</sup>

SS-Unterscharführer Günther Wagner of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie had this to say about the troops' combat experiences with their armored vehicles:

The rear door of the SPW was completely blocked with ammunition and gear. So we dismounted over the sides if we were knocked out. After the first few days in action, some practical modifications were made in the SPW set-up. Spare track pieces were hung over the front armor or sometimes an extra armored plate was bolted on with a small space between it and the front of the vehicle. Since a lot of our men were wounded in the elbows and underarms in the beginning by splinters and ricochets in the open squad compartment, we quickly fastened beams or tree branches on the upper edge of the slanted upper armor plate. This had another advantage in that it was more comfortable for sitting on when traveling in the vehicle. \( \frac{62}{3} \)

SS-Sturmmann Kuno Balz of the 13. Kompanie remembered an additional modification:

The shield on the MG 42 was poorly constructed from our point of view, because when you shot to the right or left with the machine gun, the shield turned with it and rifle or machine gun bullets hitting the shield would glance off into the squad compartment. For that reason, we placed sand bags next to the shield to prevent ricochets when we were fighting.<sup>63</sup>

After a march of more than 70 kilometers to the south toward Krasnograd, the SPW-Bataillon dug into a hedgehog position in the night of 22 February. On 23 February 1943 Peiper reported Dar Nadeshdy and Kulikowka as free of the enemy. The 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie was in Natalino and set up defensive positions.<sup>64</sup> At 2300 hours the battalion was ordered to maintain continuous contact with the "Totenkopf" Division in Wolny and in the Wshiwaja sector. The battalion occupied a new main battle line on 24 February 1943. The SPW-Bataillon carried out continuous reconnaissance. Elements of the battalion staff and the 12. Kompanie encountered the enemy at Sachthentschina. 65 The commander of the 12. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Lux Westrup, was killed at Krasnograd and the leader of his heavy platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Otto Bölck, was wounded in the head from a rifle bullet which penetrated his steel helmet. At noon on 26 February the popular Obersturmführer Westrup was buried at Krasnograd with all available officers, as well as some of the noncommissioned officers and men of the battalion, attending. Jochen Peiper spoke the last words at his grave side. Later Westrup was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer, with the promotion backdated to 30 January 1943. SS-Hauptsturmführer Georg Bormann took over command of the company.

The men of the cannon platoon of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie helped engineers cut down trees to get a clear field of fire. On 26 February 1943 SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich submitted the award recommendation for the German Cross in Gold for Jochen Peiper. He had been known and appreciated as a daredevil in the battalion and even throughout the entire division for a long time. The SPW-Bataillon which he commanded had won a reputation as an outstanding combat unit. Sturmbannführer

Peiper worked up his attack orders methodically and in a focused manner. Leading from the front, he often participated in these actions in his SPW along with his adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse. Otto Dinse, whom Peiper called Pan Dinse, had an excellent relationship with Peiper, which was ... stamped with give and take on both sides and unconditional trust. For me, although he was three years younger, he was always a role model. Of high intelligence, Peiper, himself, was always a model to his soldiers for behavior; he spared himself nothing, especially in combat. In some respects he was better than his superiors. 66

The often very unconventional leadership style practiced by Jochen Peiper was characterized, among other things, by his frequently ignoring radio messages from the regiment while he was carrying out an attack so as not to have his plans disturbed. This was known at the regiment. When the regimental commander, SS-Standartenführer Theodor Wisch, could get no answer – once again - to a radio message to Peiper during the fighting in this period, he tasked the regimental communications officer, SS-Untersturmführer Wilhelm Schermeng, to go to Peiper on a motorcycle and get a situation report from him. When Schermeng, whom Peiper had tried to get as his communications officer when forming the SPW-Bataillon, then met Peiper in a Russian hut and informed him of the reason for his presence, Peiper explained to him his reasons for not responding to radio messages. Finally he told Schermeng: "Don't worry, you're still in my good graces."67

The SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 war diary continues: "27 February 1943. Kampfgruppe Peiper remained under the division's command. Right sector boundary: Northwest corner of Petrowka – north corner of Kasatschij Maidan, 2200 hours: the Kasatschij Maidan strongpoint was abandoned."

SS-Untersturmführer Gührs of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie noted in his diary:

I had myself awakened at 0500 hours. My platoon was still providing cover with two machine guns and working in the woods ... My relationship with Jochen Thiele (author: Hauptscharführer and leader of the antitank rifle squad) gets better all the time. That pleased me quite a bit. He would certainly be more than a Hauptscharführer if he didn't have that unfortunate speech impediment. That can certainly still be remedied. He is 30 years old, a long time SS-man, eight years a Feldwebel, splendid man. In any case, I can still learn from him. We also talked about our wives frequently. He too was very happily married ... In the afternoon we changed position. The company went to Petrowka. The front was moved forward again. A Russian tank army was supposed to be heading our way. 68

After his SPW had been destroyed on 20 February SS-Sturmmann Glenewinkel was back for an advance of the 13. Kompanie: "Company attack. Hit again by an antitank gun. SPW out of action. To Poltawa." 69

Peiper, to whom the 1./SS-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung LAH was attached, received orders that night and for 28 February 1943 to occupy and hold the line Krutojarka – Lipjanka – Pterowka and to maintain contact with the Aufklärungs-Abteilung at Krutojarka and the Panzer-Pionier-Kompanie at Ziglerkowka. On 28 February Peiper's battalion was engaged in defensive fighting at Kegitschewka, which was under continuous Russian attack from the northeast and northwest. Three Soviet tanks were knocked out. At 1315 hours the 11. (gep.) Kompanie carried out a flank attack from Petrowka into the enemy forces attacking Kegitschewka and was able to smash a Soviet battalion. At 1605 hours the SPW-Bataillon was under so much pressure that the divisional operations arranged with Peiper to pull the battalion back that night to the west bank of the Wschiwaja and then attack

to the southeast in the morning.

SS-Untersturmführer Gührs noted:

Waves of Stukas attacked in the morning. Today was Sunday. At noon I went to the 13. Kompanie with our radio SPW and my cannon vehicle. We launched an attack. The Russians were taken completely by surprise. Fighting against antitank guns. We swung to the right and attacked Rassochowatoje. Enemy was very strong. After an hour we put down smoke and withdrew. One SPW was lost. It was burning. In the darkness we pulled back to the 11. Kompanie. After that I went with the battalion commander to the 12. Kompanie. It alternated snow and rain. Moreover it was pitch black. This was no fun. There were fresh signs of fighting there too. We were in Losowaja by 2000 hours. The village was packed. Elements of the Aufklärungs-Abteilung and two tank companies. The 12. Kompanie was providing cover. I brought my gun into position. Jacobi's gun had destroyed three antitank guns ...

A messenger arrived at 2400 hours. I went to the battalion commander. At least I'd been able to get three hours of sleep. The command post was busy. The commander sat at the telephone. Like a swarm of bees. We were briefed on the new situation. Early morning, at 0600 hours, attack with the Panzer-Abteilung and the Aufklärungs-Abteilung. The battalion was to assemble immediately in Petrowka.

The drivers weren't to be envied. Snow, slush and no lights. I had the column get ready. We moved off. Once again everything was jammed up. We got through with a lot of swearing and yelling. At a bridge we ran into a rocket launcher battalion. They were supposed to provide the artillery preparation and had to be ready to fire at 0430 hours. Then a SPW drove into a ditch. Once again everything was a mess. There was a Panzer-Kompanie behind us which was also supposed to occupy attack positions at Ziglerowka. We were at Petrowka at 0300 hours. 70

On 1 March 1943 Peiper attacked Jeremejewka through Ziglerowka and destroyed an enemy column. The attack which was originally slated through the Wschiwaja sector on Kegitschewka was called off because thawing conditions had covered the terrain with a thick layer of mud which made passage almost impossible.

#### SS-Untersturmführer Gührs:

At 0600 hours we finished taking up ready positions in Ziglerowka. A piece of bread and a swig of "aggressive spirit" and breakfast was over. Our companies were attached to the tank companies. The weather was terribly unfavorable. Thick fog. You could hardly see 100 meters, so any antitank gun could destroy us. Despite that, the attack was ordered to go ahead. I was livid. I rode in our radio SPW. The attack rolled out. At Kasatchiji Maidan the Russians were too surprised and our attack too fierce. It got bad five kilometers further on. There was firing from every direction. You simply couldn't see a thing. The enemy antitank soldiers let us approach all bunched up and shot our SPW to pieces. Two were already burning. The crews had bailed out. Hits everywhere. The Russians were shooting from out of the fog, and we couldn't see a thing. The attack was broken off after an hour of this useless struggle. We rolled back to Ziglerowka. It was really too bad. I was very depressed. I went to the battalion command post in Petrowka. I stayed with (Untersturmführer) David (Margait) there. The radio SPW and my cannon vehicles were parked next to us in the houses. Our rations vehicle came around. It was at the company. The Hauptsturmführer (Kolitz) had been providing cover at Lipjanka for days with the Pionierzug and the Infanterie-Geschütz-Zug and other units ... Hopefully we can get a good night's sleep tonight. I would give my entire paycheck for the opportunity. I heard, "Wake-up at 0400 hours" and then went to sleep.

2 March 1943. Today we attacked in three Kampfgruppen. Attack and pursuit. We topped off with fuel and ammunition. At 0700 hours attack positions north of Kofanowka. The Luftwaffe was very active today. The attack began. First objective: Loginwy. I was with the 12. Kompanie for the attack. The 12. Kompanie had point. Logwiny was taken. Pak fire from the left didn't affect us. The Russians cleared out. We got right on their heels. Naturally, we could move faster than the Russians could disengage. The deployed battalion rolled forward. There was an explosion. An SPW next to me was hit. The next moment an assault gun was hit. It started to smoke. The crew got out.

Nothing was working. We had to put down smoke and observe. Three tanks and two antitank guns were firing everything they had at us from the other side. After ten minutes the way was clear. Everything destroyed. There were more positions over on the left on the hill. We turned and attacked. We rolled over the new positions. There was nothing left to stop us. We started the pursuit. When it grew dark, a bloody day was finally over. ... The Russians must have lost around 800 dead ... there was no quarter. We had one dead, but he didn't die in vain. We captured about 10 guns, destroyed two tanks, and advanced 40 kilometers!

As the fighting died down, the battalion commander remarked in his humorous way that we were really "at the wrong funeral". By evening we were at Melechowka where we threw the Russians out and took up quarters. I was with the 12. Kompanie. A successful day was over. It was a pity though, that two SPW hit mines while out on reconnaissance.<sup>71</sup>

When the SPW-Bataillon – reinforced by the 1. Sturmgeschütz-Batterie – attacked Tarathenka on 2 March 1943, SS-Untersturmführer Ernst Gaschnitz was on point until his assault gun was brought to a halt by antitank gun rounds to the superstructure and right idler. Gaschnitz, the gunner and the loader were wounded and had to dismount. Despite that, Gaschnitz jumped back into the assault gun. He was able to get it back into driving condition and brought it under cover where it could be retrieved.<sup>72</sup>

On that day the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 war diary recorded:

"According to reconnaissance reports from our scouts and from the Luftwaffe, Logwiny is occupied by 200 to 300 enemy troops. In cooperation with Bataillon Peiper, Logwiny was taken at 1020 hours after breaking enemy resistance."

Every element of Peiper's battalion was in action at Logwiny.<sup>74</sup> The 13. Kompanie lost seven SPW in the fighting for Melechowka.

Peiper reported on the 11. Kompanie and its commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Erhard Guhl, in this action:

When the battalion launched its attack on Tarathenka on 2 March 1943, Guhl, making skillful use of terrain conditions, hit the Russians in the flank, tore two companies apart and captured two firing batteries and a large number of antitank rifles, supply vehicles and horses. On 3 March 1943 the strongly held village of Petscheiwka was taken in a night attack. Extraordinary terrain problems added considerably to the difficulty of the operation. On his own initiative, Guhl swung far out and took the surprised enemy in the rear. Leading his men, he entered the houses. Despite a damaged SPW, he rammed an antitank gun and ensured the battalion's success by his rapid actions. On 4 March 1943 the important village of Stanitschnoje was attacked. It was protected by a Pakfront (strong line of antitank guns). Kompanie Guhl on the right was also at the focal point of the action there. Disregarding the heavy defensive fire, it passed by the village at high speed, breached three in-depth minefields and then, following the aggressive example of its company commander, who

always personally took the point, rolled into Stanitschnoje, where it destroyed five long 7.62 cm (guns), five medium antitank guns, and rounded up an entire battalion staff.<sup>75</sup>

At 2000 hours on 4 March 1943 the following radio message was sent: "Kampfgruppe Peiper took Stanitschnoje at 0815 hours and pursued the fleeing enemy as far as Jewdokimowka and Lichowa".

Three SPW were knocked out, two of them totally destroyed. The battalion staff and the 11., 12., and 13. Kompanien fought at Stanitschnoje. "The troops have tremendous faith in their commander's luck. Jochen Peiper has become an idol!" wrote Gührs. This testimony concerning his leader may be considered to represent the feelings of the entire battalion towards its commander.

On 3 March 1943 SS-Untersturmführer Gührs brought the captured vehicles and the crews from friendly destroyed armor to Krasnograd. 78 From the point of view of an SPW driver, one of them stated:

Peiper was our role model. Everyone said that he rode in his SPW and that's how the new fighting style developed. Drivers, formerly considered as low men on the totem pole, were then at a premium. No one else knew their way around an SPW. During SPW training we had practiced changing track links, pads and pins under the roughest of conditions. So in action, we all knew what to do and could install or fix whatever was necessary. After the first SPW was lost to a direct hit, three or four rows of track links were fixed to the front plate so that the shells would be directed elsewhere. Whenever we could get to a work shop, we had two armor plates welded to the front so that the reserve track links could be stowed between them. The belief arose that shells would glance off and do no damage. Fortunately, no driver could select his squad or his superior, or we would all have been drivers for the battalion commander. There were no good and bad drivers, for rivalry was keen, and in his own way each man was the best.79

"5 March 1943. Reconnaissance by the III. Bataillon discovered strong enemy elements in Gawrilowka, fleeing to the east." The Leibstandarte and the entire SS-Panzer-Korps were on the offensive, which helped inspire everyone. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs wrote:

In 30 days the fortunes of war had turned again ... I didn't describe in my diary how the general situation appeared to me. Now, maybe I could say it. I could have easily written in my diary: "We are losing the war." Perhaps thousands of others did. It was enough to drive one to despair. Men fled to the rear. We asked ourselves if the words courage and bravery were just empty rhetoric. Then we received a call to arms and an order of the day from the Führer. The fate of our people stood on razor's edge. Then we fought ...

Our Panzer-Grenadier-Bataillon has torn a bloody furrow in Russian soil. We took the lead in front of all the rest. Anywhere something was happening, we were there ...

When Obersturmbannführer Meyer was with the Führer and received the Oak Leaves, the Führer said that the appearance of the Leibstandarte in this theater had been decisive for the southern front.<sup>81</sup>

On 6 March 1943 the entire SPW-Bataillon moved via points 193.8 and 188.9 to Hf. Bridok. For his actions during this attack, Jochen Peiper was nominated for the Knight's Cross on the following day by teletype.

SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper, commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, was given the mission on 6 March 1943 to break enemy resistance along the general line running from the southern edge of

Prossjanoje – Hf. Ljaschowa – Gawrilowka and to advance to Hf. Peressel (main objective). Launching the attack at 1145 hours, he reached the southern outskirts of Peressel by 1345 hours. By 1400 hours he had broken through the enemy defensive lines under construction there and, on his own initiative, advanced far beyond the main objective. Moving through enemy columns, he pushed a stronger enemy out of prepared positions at Federowka – Hf. Bridok at 1530 hours and established a bridgehead. He held this bridgehead, in spite of the fact that he was cut off from all rearward lines of communication and was under attack by strong enemy forces on all sides. Three T-34's were destroyed. By these actions, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper laid the groundwork for the successful attack on Walki on 7 March 1943.82

While fighting for the Bridok Bridgehead on 6 March – which Peiper reported to the regiment at 1520 hours by radio – the fleeing enemy forces were smashed by the main body of the SPW-Bataillon. The enemy elements fleeing from the I. and II. Bataillone were destroyed when they ran into Peiper's battalion. A single SPW was lost.

Peiper's report concerning Guhl's 11. Kompanie in this action ran as follows:

On 6 March 1943 the battalion smashed through the designated objective all the way into the Msha Sector and established the bridgehead at Bridok-Federowka, which laid the groundwork for the capture of Walki, which took place on the following day. Once again, Guhl played an extremely important role. Although he had only two operational SPW left, he broke an enemy flanking attempt with incredible aggressiveness and daring. He personally destroyed two antitank guns, three mortars and seven trucks and was the first vehicle to push into Bridok from the west. He immediately attacked and destroyed a fleeing enemy company in a relentless attack, which left 80 dead on the spot. Thanks to this aggressive covering action on the left flank, which was fueled by his own initiative, the other elements of the battalion succeeded in establishing the bridgehead.<sup>83</sup>

By attacking Walki from the east on 7 March, the SPW-Bataillon was to enable the advance of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1. "7 March 1943. Bataillon Peiper (author: with the attached 1./SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1) thrust to Hf. Tscheremuschnaja and as far as the road to Ljubotin. It hooked up with the Aufklärungs-Abteilung on the north edge of Walki. 2000 hours: Bataillon Peiper ordered to advance through Hf. Karawan to Komuna."84

SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Standartenführer Wisch reached Federowka and Bridok at noon, where the I. and II. Bataillone assumed bridgehead security from the III. (gep.) Bataillon. Along with Peiper, Obersturmbannführer Kurt Meyer's Aufklärungs-Abteilung and the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 under Sturmbannführer Max Wünsche were launched in an attack on Walki. After breaking through a Pakfront north of Sneshkoff Kut, the Kampfgruppe pushed into Walki from the southwest at 1315 hours. SS-Untersturmführer Maurer of the 2./SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung:

Alternating mud and frost. We're no longer a reconnaissance unit, but soldiers mounted on every possible armored company. The next objective was Walki. Antitank guns, machine guns, and mortar fire on the outskirts. The Russians were putting up a stubborn defense. We dismounted and our tanks fought it out with nests of antitank guns. This duel took place not 150 meters in front of us. Obersturmführer Beck was knocked out twice within a few minutes only to get back into the next tank on the battlefield. Our attack had bogged down and we're lying right in front of the enemy's lines.

Suddenly, I see our commander, Obersturmbannführer Kurt Meyer, to the right of me, getting out of an SPW. He held up a rifle. The spell was broken; we stormed forward and broke through the position. We rolled it up with hand grenades, going from foxhole to foxhole. We then had the river at the southern edge of Walki in front of us. Tanks provided covering fire, and we went all at once across the ice and into the village. We were firing everything that we had and yelling like crazy men. Ivan couldn't take it. He fled. But we were completely exhausted. Our faces were covered with sweat. Our legs simply wouldn't support us any more. At that moment four self-propelled 2 cm flak guns showed up and helped us fight isolated pockets of resistance using explosive shells. The enemy could no longer hold out, and had to run again. So we simply mounted up with the flak and, without any express orders, pushed through to the northeast.

We left the Russians running to our right and left for those following us. My people had barely got their breath back, but already you could hear them start up their favorite tune:

"It will be spring without end, the whole world full of sunshine". Not one hour before, we were fighting for every foxhole, and now those guys were singing again. I was proud of them and happy that my platoon took no casualties in the fighting. After a few kilometers we encountered a company from the Bataillon Peiper.<sup>85</sup>

The commander of the Aufklärungs-Abteilung, Oak Leaves winner SS-Obersturmbannführer Kurt Meyer, discussed the next move together with Peiper. Meyer's adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Günter Hollatz, remembered Peiper during these meetings:

At that time he and his III. SPW-Bataillon were working together with our reinforced Aufklärungs-Abteilung under Panzermeyer, and he was at our command post several times. A tactically superior armor commander – rather calm and collected – who, however, carried out daring and bold advances. Similar to Panzermeyer in his approach to tactics, Panzermeyer was somewhat more spontaneous and robust. Peiper was more distant with his noble bearing and more of a general staff type. Very friendly.86

The regimental commander at the time, Theodor Wisch, who was later to command the division, characterized Jochen Peiper, Hugo Kraas and Kurt Meyer, as the Leibstandarte commanders who gave the division its push and panache.

8 March 1943, 0630 hours: Commander conference. 0700 hours: assemble. Bataillon Peiper found strong enemy forces in Ogulzy. Because of poor road conditions and very difficult terrain, the attack only progressed slowly. During the night, the battalion covered the line Point 198.3 – northern outskirts of Ogulzy. Kampfgruppe Peiper was able to establish a bridgehead at Hf. Karawan after breaking very stubborn enemy resistance.87

Concerning the actions of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, Peiper wrote:

On 8 March 1943, the battalion – attacking from the south – advanced to Ljubotin, established a bridgehead in a surprise night operation and took the city itself on the following day. Guhl once again gave proof of his composure and circumspection. In spite of heavy defensive fire and the surprise employment of Russian heavy mortars, he was one of the first onto the bridge, placed infiltration troops into dead space, and eliminated numerous antitank guns and antitank rifles on our flanks.<sup>88</sup>

The II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 tore Ogulzy away from the stubbornly fighting enemy defenders in close combat and took the village before the fall of darkness, thus eliminating a threat to the flanks of Peiper's battalion advancing across the Merefa Brook.<sup>89</sup> Elements of Peiper's staff and the 11., 12., and 13. Kompanien were engaged in close combat at Hf. Rewtschik.<sup>90</sup>

SS-Sturmbannführer Dr. Ludwig Stumpfegger was in the SPW-Bataillon, but he was not assigned as a surgeon. He went into action in an SPW to prove himself at the front. He received the Iron Cross, 1st Class on 25 April 1943. Stumpfegger, who was from Munich, was an SS-Obersturmführer and Hitler's personal physician at the end of the war. He took his own life together with Bormann near the Lehrter Railroad Station in the Invalidenstraße after the breakout from the Führer Bunker on 2 May 1945 ended in apparent failure. Their remains were only found 30 years later.<sup>91</sup>

On 9 March 1943 SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. The news ran through the entire battalion like wildfire. The men were proud of the high award given their commander, and regarded it as confirmation and recognition of their own combat achievements. The Panzergrenadiere of the 11. Kompanie decorated their SPW with flowers. Peiper received the following message from the Reichsführer SS by radio:

My sincere, good wishes on the award of the Knight's Cross, my dear Jochen! I'm proud of you! May the fortunes of war continue to shine on you. Sigurd is well. Best wishes from everyone.

Heil Hitler!

Yours truly,

H. Himmler 93

In an article published in "Das schwarze Korps" (The Black Corps), SS War Reporter Dr. Arthur Venn wrote the following about Peiper:

... in preparation for the attack on Kharkov, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper, on his own initiative, took possession of bridgeheads in two places, which were of decisive significance for the passage of attacking forces. The tactical measures for these operations were very different and fit the enemy situation surprisingly well each time. Surprise - which was the decisive factor – was complete each time, so that a great deal of enemy equipment fell into the battalion's hands. What is inadequately described there in words citing only a few examples, only intimates the intense drama of real combat. In every phase, however, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper was master of the situation. Commanders of the attached units often received orders which ran contrary to every accepted practice, but which proved to be the right ones and which were carried out with enthusiasm. All of Kampfgruppe Peiper's officers and men had a feeling of security. One man worked and took care of them all here. He made rapid decisions and issued his orders with formal precision. These decisions and orders were often daring and unusual, but they were given from a sovereign mastery of the situation. Everyone recognized the careful work and instinctive sureness behind them.

Of course, the fortunes of war also smiled on the commander. But the unconditional trust of his men was based on something else, on the feeling that a born leader was in command there, filled with the greatest feeling of responsibility for the life of every individual man but still able to be hard when necessary. Orders and instructions didn't come from hesitant deliberation, but from within a character which united heart, mind and hand.<sup>94</sup>

Peiper had no time to properly celebrate his award of the Knight's Cross. The Ninth of March was a tough day of fighting for him and for his battalion. "9 March 1943, 0730 hours: Kampfgruppe Peiper moved through Ljubotin and made contact with the 1. Regiment at Komuna. 1100 hours: III. Bataillon attacked Hf. Bogatiy and destroyed a reinforced Russian battalion" At 1855 hours Peiper radioed the 2. Regiment:

- 1. Kampfgruppe Peiper after 0600 hours from reference point 628 in a northwest direction to point 612 Komuna; there contact established with Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1.
- 2. 1100 Hours: Attack on Hf. Bogatiy, a Russian battalion destroyed.
- 3. Battalion has taken up positions in the eastern outskirts of the village of Hf. Bogatiy.
- 4. Enemy Losses: A heavy frame-launched rocket battery with 23 multiple projectors, 2 12.2 cm howitzers, 4 4.7 cm guns, 6 antitank rifles, 5 heavy machine guns, 7 light mortars, 25 trucks, 250 dead Russians.
- 5. Our Losses: KIA: one noncommissioned officer. Wounded: two men (one remaining with the unit) %

The complete Bataillon Peiper, along with elements of the 6., 10. and 16. Kompanien of the 2. Regiment, were engaged in close combat at Ljubotin. At 1000 hours Kampfgruppe Meyer and SS-Panzer-Grenadier Regiment 1 reported making contact with the "Totenkopf" Division at Olschany. The war diary continued:

1900 hours: commander conference for the attack on Kharkov. The following units would be employed: on the right, the II. Bataillon received the mission to force a breakthrough at the northwest edge of the city with the mass of the battalion west of the railway embankment and then take the main railroad station; on the left, the I. Bataillon received the mission to take Aleksejewka and the north edge of Kharkov to open the way for the III. Bataillon; III. Bataillon at Podgorodnaja was to be ready for immediate action. Attack scheduled to begin at 0330 hours. 91

The Leibstandarte was to attack Kharkov from the north and the "Das Reich" Division from the west, while the "Totenkopf" Division covered the flank and rear of the LAH. The commander of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl, was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class on 9 March 1943. Peiper's recommendation for the award ran as follows:

SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl had already earned the Iron Cross, 1st Class in the campaign in France which, however, was denied him later in spite of promises made. During the defensive fighting in which the battalion is presently engaged, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl has constantly stood out with his extraordinary command style. In uninterrupted succession, he was a shining example of courage to his men and a considerable part of the battalion's success was due to his skillful leadership.98

SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff from Memel, platoon leader in the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, also received the Iron Cross, 1st Class.

At the beginning of the attack on Kharkov, the 1./SS-

Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 under SS-Hauptsturmführer Prinz, was attached to Peiper again. It had the 7.5 cm "Marder" (marten) self-propelled antitank guns. SS-Panzer-Grenadier Regiment 1 under SS-Standartenführer Fritz Witt took Dergatschi at noon on 10 March 1943 against stubborn Soviet resistance. From East Dergatschi, the reinforced Aufklürungs-Abteilung attacked Tscherkaaskoje and Zirkuny which it reached in the evening. During the evening and night the 1. Regiment established a position on the attack axis Tscherkasskoje – Kharkov which reached the airfield on the north edge of Kharkov. Hindered by unfavorable road conditions, the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 reached the road running from north to south toward Kharkov, and engaged enemy elements south of Podgorodnaja. The II/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was at Malaja Danilowka. The divisional orders read:

- 1. Enemy completely surprised by the rapid advance of the Leibstandarte and thrown back.
- 2. SS-Panzerkorps took Kharkov on 11 March 1943 with left flank covered along the Merefa by elements of the SS-Division "Das Reich" and the north and northwest flanks covered by the "Totenkopf" Division along the line Russkoje Dergatschi Festki—Olschany ... 100

The attack on Kharkov continued on the following morning. "11 March 1943, 0330 hours. The I. Bataillon moved out and ran into very stubborn enemy resistance". In costly fighting the I. Bataillon, under Sturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, took Aleksejewka after a Stuka attack. The brunt of the attack was borne by the 2. Kompanie under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Becker; it was assisted by elements of the 3. Kompanie. SS-Standartenführer Fritz Witt's 1. Regiment attacked the northern outskirts of Kharkov at 0400 hours and had to push back a counterattack across the Kharkov-North air field which was aimed at its left flank. After hard fighting the Panzergrenadiere of the 1. Regiment reached the northern edge of Kharkov. The I./Werfer-Regiment 55 supported the advance. In the evening Peiper's SPW-Bataillon pushed forward to Losowenka.

On 12 March 1943 his battalion was also employed to attack Kharkov. The 3. Sturmgeschütz-Batterie, under its distinguished commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Rettlinger, was attached to his battalion along with the 1. Panzerjäger-Kompanie. A platoon leader of the assault gun battery reports:

On the morning of 12 March the column formed up in mixed order along the main road toward the center of the city. The first objective was to be Red Square. But where was it, and which road led to it? For the time being that question was of interest only to the Kampfgruppe commander in the forward third of the lead elements and the point vehicle itself. This time, oddly enough, it's an SPW, with a second one following it. Then there's an assault gun, and then two more SPW. My assault gun was only in sixth position. The point moved out at 1000 hours and the main body followed.

And, sure enough, there's a obstacle on the road just a few hundred meters ahead after the first bend. I couldn't make out details from so far back. Looking past on either side of the column with the scissors scope, I could only see wood heaped up in some distance. German machine gun fire, a few rifle shots, then quiet again. Only the impatient rumble of the idling engines. Otherwise, nothing else moved, and nothing was going on. But

remaining there put us in great danger. If we had one or two vehicles hit and destroyed "or blown up and burned from close quarters" while we were stopped there, it would have blocked everyone else. Another concern: What was hiding in and behind the obstacle? Were there mines, were there antitank guns laying in ambush and ready to fire, or something else? No matter what was there, we couldn't just sit there any longer. So, take a chance and move out!

Every one of the crew repeated his assignment over the intercom and confirmed, "Understood!". The driver, Sturmmann Kalb, skillfully moved the assault gun to the left past the vehicles in front of us to the point. Then it became clear that the barrier – a few wooden wagons with stakes with wood heaped up and around them – was no formidable obstacle for us. "Put it in high gear. Give it some gas. Engage at will." A chambered high-explosive round left the muzzle and we broke through the barricade with machine gun support. The cracking and splintering of wood under the force of the moving tracks was absorbed by our earphones in the assault gun. "Keep going. Don't Stop. Keep going! Keep going!" The column fell in behind us and followed the assault gun which was then in the lead.

Once more, we were lucky. There was a street which undoubtedly led toward the city center. At places, there were dangerous electrical street car lines hanging down, undoubtedly cut by artillery fire. Some of them just hung down, but some sagged low and threatened to cut off the superstructure. Isolated rifle fire from houses on both sides of the street didn't bother us. The advance was moving rapidly, until the street which had become wider forked. Did we go straight ahead or swing left onto the somewhat wider street? It was then that we missed having a map of the city. There was no radio contact with the Kampfgruppe commander. Luckily, we selected the left-hand street and soon it opened up into a wide circle. Was this the Red Square already? Yes, it was. I recognized German fighting vehicles and helmets. We had done it. Friendly greeting with the men of Panzer-Grenadier Regiment 1 and supporting units. Among them was also my friend Rolf Mobius (author: commander of the 2./ SS-Flak-Abteilung 1).

Right in the middle of the excited exchange of war stories, my commander Rettlinger came over to me with orders to provide immediate support with my gun to the grenadiers advancing on the Red House. It was supposed to be somewhere close-by. There were supposed to be Commissars holed up in there who shot down anyone who approached. The grenadiers were already reporting losses. On the way there I was to be briefed by our people who had taken cover. That was all he knew. The crew was informed of the mission and the conditions of our approach, not without taking another thirst-quenching drink from their canteens first. Then we mounted up and moved off alone into the near-by uncertainty. We pulled a quarter way around Red Square and followed the instructions given. At intervals, we passed through intersections. There were no more grenadiers to be seen. But then, hugging a wall and waving frantically, we saw a soldier pointing unmistakably at a tall corner building just 200 meters in front of us. That must be the Red House. Halt.

In the scissors scope I was looking down the barrels of rifles sticking out of firing points in half walled-up windows in the upper floors. That was the Red House! On the intercom to the crew:

Intersection in front of us on the far right side, conspicuous tall corner house. Put the gun across from it, but far enough away, otherwise we'll be too close, and we won't have enough distance for firing. Alternate high-explosive and shaped charges as fast as possible. First shoot in the building door, then the windows from bottom to top, first right then left. Loader, drum in the machine gun and give it to me. I'll fire out of the upper hatch. Open fire when the gun is in position and only on my orders! Any questions? Driver, put in your kinon vision block (a piece of bulletproof glass, which fit into the driver's vision slit and gave him both vision and protection). Put the ammo where you can get it. Gunner is to fire independently when ready. Everything clear? Move out.

As soon as the first shell hit the wall, it started to come apart. There was dust and soon we were enveloped in a thick cloud of it, which allowed the grenadiers to approach from nearby cover. Behind and to the right, I saw a few stand up with submachine guns ready. They waited, ready to go as soon as we ceased fire. "Cease fire!" And then they sprang forward across the debris past us and stormed the house. On the way back to Red Square, an enemy cavalry troop suddenly crossed the street in front of us from a side street in a full gallop. We followed them a short distance. But they vanished as rapidly as they had appeared. Further pursuit wasn't worthwhile. My assault gun was expected back ...

The Kampfgruppe had already assembled along the Staro – Moskowska Road. I immediately took point position with my assault gun. I heard that we were going toward Panzermeyer, whose Kampfgruppe we had no contact with. We made good progress, undisturbed by the enemy, up to a small stone bridge over the Lopan, which was also called the Kharkov River. It flowed right through the northern part of the city. The bridge was later called the "The Peiper Bridge" by the LAH. 102

The war diary commented:

12 March 1943 ... 1030 hours. The III. Bataillon went into action and advanced along the main street to make prearranged contact point with the 1. Regiment at "Red Square"; turned to the east and made contact with the Aufklärungs-Abteilung on the Staro – Moskowska Road. 1600 hours: Two Russian battalions were completely destroyed between the Lopan River and the main road.

At first the armored personnel carriers of the 11. Kompanie moved in column through the streets to the city limits of Kharkov. The SPW of SS-Unterscharführer "Pike" ("Lance") Bliesner - with the name "Strolch" ("Vagabond") painted on it was followed by the SPW of SS-Unterscharführer Karl Kempfes, who was fatally wounded shortly thereafter. The Russians put up a tremendous resistance. Peiper's grenadiers then had to fight their way forward through the large city of Kharkov in indescribably hard street and house-to-house fighting. The SPW-Bataillon took considerable casualties. After Peiper had made contact with SS-Sturmbannführer Max Hansen, the commander of the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier Regiment 1, on Red Square, he established a bridgehead in the Staro - Moskowska road. Following that Peiper sent out two SPW and established contact with Panzermeyer's Aufklärungs-Abteilung at the Tschungujew junction. The II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 took the railroad station after hard fighting and advanced from there as far as Katerinslawska Street where it made contact with Peiper's battalion.<sup>103</sup> The bridge over the Kharkov River was named after Jochen Peiper. Assault gun platoon leader SS-Obersturmführer Hans Siegel described the fighting at the "Peiper" Bridge:

I wanted to stop in front of the bridge to observe and get off a shot. Suddenly, I noticed my driver had stopped about a third of the way across the bridge. "Pull this can back. Get off the bridge!" And we had barely got back onto solid ground, when the bridge was blown up. They were just waiting for a couple of us to get stuck on the other side, all by ourselves, to let all hell loose. Too bad, little brothers, it didn't work. However, I was under sniper fire. The scissors scope was hit. Shortly after that – I was observing with my binoculars then - my binoculars were hit by a piece of shrapnel which wounded my cheek. Blood flowed out and down the back of my gunner's neck. Just as he noticed that, we were hit again by a round from an antitank rifle. Fortunately it didn't penetrate but it made a loud noise. He suddenly yelled "I've been hit." The 17 year-old's nerves were shot. No wonder, after all these days and nights without sleep. At first I thought he had been hit. I pulled my gun back under cover; there was a curve in the street near the bridge, and so the houses provided some cover. My two other guns were still behind me. Short orders group. The bridge was blown up, so we couldn't get across that way, and our guns were too light for shooting at buildings. We reported to the rear. 104

SS-Sturmmann Heinz Glenewinkel of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie commented in his diary: "Breakthrough to "Red Square". Attack across the blown-up Peiper Bridge. Heavy street fighting. Company lost 30 men." SS-Unterscharführer Martin Säuberlich's SPW of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie was hit by an antitank rifle and a squad member was killed. 106

On this 12 March 1943 the following men in Peiper's Bataillon were awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class: SS-Unterscharführer Max Rode (11. Kompanie), SS-Oberscharführer Bruno Wessels and SS-Oberscharführer Adolf Sellmeier (12. Kompanie); and SS-Unterscharführer Willfried Huber (13. Kompanie). There were also 52 Iron Crosses, 2nd Class awarded.

Peiper's mission for the next day was: "Reinforced III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was to establish ongoing contact with Kampfgruppe Witt at the Tschugujew/Woltschansk road junction". This day saw Peiper's battalion back in hard street fighting in the Ukrainian capital.

13 March 1943. III. Bataillon was engaged in heavy house fighting at the bridge across the Kharkov river on Moskowska Street. A bridgehead was won and steadily expanded in stubborn, bitter fighting. 1300 hours: The III. Bataillon reached the Korsykiwska-Konjuschewo road junction and made contact with the Aufklärungs-Abteilung. I. and II. Bataillone systematically mopped up the individual parts of the city in close cooperation with the III. Bataillon. They reached Saikiwska Street at dusk, providing cover to the southeast, east, and northeast. 108

Assault gun platoon leader SS-Obersturmführer Siegel described the beginning of the attack across the Peiper Bridge:

It was probably about 0500 hours on the morning of March 13 when a messenger brought orders to bring the battery back up to yesterday's positions immediately. During the night the engineers had rebuilt it and an assault troop had already established a foothold on the opposite bank. It took a little longer than usual before all of the assault gun engines were warmed up enough for

driving. When we arrived there, a bit late, the column was already assembled and ready to move out, reinforced by antitank guns under the command of Hauptsturmführer Prinz. Without stopping, I moved my gun immediately to the point, and stopped, just like yesterday at the bridgehead.

And then what was I supposed to do? I didn't know, so I dismounted and ran back along the column for instructions. But about half way I was waved down by Rettlinger and Peiper. I heard something like "Let's go! Move out!" Uncertain, I remained standing for a moment undecided. Point driver with no directions? That didn't make any sense to me. After even louder shouts and more vigorous waving by the pair, I finally managed to get it and turned around. Although I understood them, I wasn't one bit smarter than before. On the way back, I shouted to the company commanders Bormann and Guhl (author: 12. and 11. SPW Kompanien, respectively) that I was going to move out as soon as I got back in the assault gun. Just before reaching the assault gun, I put my helmet back on while moving. I wanted to board the vehicle as usual.

I stepped on one of the road wheels, put my foot on the upper track and pulled myself up on the left-hand side onto the rear deck. With both hands I gripped the upper edge of the round hatch opening and tried to jump through it to get inside.

In the middle of my maneuver I hear a gun go off very close to me. I had the feeling I was doing a handstand and noticed that the shot was meant for me. He shot one more time; I had to get away from the assault gun. I shoved myself away from the hatch with my hands, fell back onto the engine deck and slid off. Head first, I fell two meters down to the pavement and lay stretched out next to the left track. I wanted to get up and run away, but I could only support myself on my lower arm and raise my head a little. I looked over my stretched-out body, but it seemed to be unwounded. Only my legs seemed as though they were separated from the body and full of sawdust. I could feel the muscles of my bowels and bladder slowly relaxing. Then blood was flowing out of both mouth and nose. Shot through the lungs and also hit in the spine? I thought I knew what happened and closed my eyes. It didn't even shock me to think that Kharkov was my end. 109 (author: Siegel survived the snipers bullet, however, and fought as a company commander in Panzer-Regiment "Hitlerjugend" in Normandy, where he received the Knight's Cross.)

The SPW-Bataillon began its attack nevertheless. SS-Unterscharführer Martin Säuberlich of the 12. (armored ) Kompanie, the lead company, wrote:

During the retaking of Kharkov, the 1. Zug of Obersturmführer Schmidt had cleared the block of houses on the other side of the so-called Peiper Bridge. Two squads were in action, one on the left with Obersturmführer Schmidt and the 1st squad on the right. We drove over the bridge still in our SPW, then dismounted to continue the house-to-house fighting. 110

SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt was wounded on 13 March during the bridge crossing and the subsequent house-to-house fighting.<sup>111</sup> His 1. Zug had already suffered heavy casualties while crossing the bridge and was subsequently only at squad strength. After the platoon had crossed the bridge on SPW, it advanced dismounted to the tractor factory, where the last squad leader, SS-Unterscharführer Säuberlich, was wounded and put out of action.<sup>112</sup> SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Jacobi, commander of an SPW with a 7.5 cm cannon in the 14. (schwere gepanzerte)

Kompanie, took a direct hit and was killed.

Jochen Peiper was a model and a champion for his men in the Kharkov street fighting as he was everywhere else. SS-Rottenführer Heinz Freyer of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie saw the commander in Kharkov: "When we finally fought dismounted, in the houses, at the theater and in the tractor works, he was always up front." The platoon leader of the Pionier-Zug of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Haferstroh, was wounded, and the cannon platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, took over the platoon. By then, the cannon platoon only had one SPW left in action.

At 2035 hours, the 2. Regiment radioed the division:

Since early morning Kampfgruppe Peiper has been expanding the bridgehead across the Leharki River in the Staro-Moskowska Road. Enemy resistance is extraordinarily fierce. Every single block of houses must be systematically cleaned out. Russians are located in the individual blocks of houses with machine guns, antitank guns and antitank rifles and are fighting stubbornly.<sup>115</sup>

SS-Rottenführer Oswald Siegmund of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie wrote:

The hardest and most terrible fighting for the so-called Peiper Bridge was on 13 March 1943, a Sunday. The 12. Kompanie lost half of its men during the street fighting behind the bridge and fighting for the GPU building. Our company commander – Tomhardt – was wounded once again and encircled with elements of a platoon. The 7th squad was killed to the last man. 116

SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt and SS-Untersturmführer Dieter Kohler of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie were wounded, as were SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt and SS-Untersturmführer Joachim Kaden of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie. The fighting in the maze of streets was hard. Block after block had to be cleared in close-quarter fighting. Heavy weapons also had to be employed in the street fighting – 88 mm flak guns and artillery. The Soviets defended themselves with submachine guns, machine guns, antitank rifles, tanks and antitank guns. Their tanks waited in ambush in building entrances and in court yards. By evening, two thirds of the large city was in the hands of the Leibstandarte.

Peiper's orders for 14 March 1943 read:

The III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 will advance along Petinka Street as far as the railway bridge in support of the Aufklärungs-Abteilung and provide cover there. The blocks of houses south of the street are to be cleared up to and including Uralska Street. If necessary, the agricultural research facility is to be taken.<sup>117</sup>

The war diary: "14 March 1943, 0800 hours. The III. Bataillon launched another attack and thrust to the south in its assigned sector. In hard fighting it reached the Woksal Railroad Station". 118

Block after block was torn from the enemy grasp in tough, stubborn street fighting and at 1645 hours, the entire center of the city was firmly in the hands of the Leibstandarte.

In the afternoon all German radio broadcasts broadcast:

Special report! From Führer Headquarters, 14 March 1943. The Wehrmacht High Command announces that Army Group South has counterattacked and thrown the enemy back over the Donez after weeks of fighting. In a pincers attack from the north and east and after days of hard fighting, it has also taken back

the city of Kharkov with units of the Waffen-SS, effectively supported by the Luftwaffe. Enemy losses in men and materièl have not yet been able to be estimated.<sup>119</sup>

The commander of the Leibstandarte, SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich, received the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross. On 15 March 1943 the mopping up of the city progressed systematically and was brought to a close.

This successfully closed the 300 kilometer wide gap in the lines between Army Group South and Army Group Center, which had occurred as a result of the loss of Stalingrad and its consequences. It resolved the worst crisis on the Eastern Front. The Leibstandarte was able to bring the Soviet attack to a halt along a 100-kilometer-wide front west of Kharkov, destroy important enemy troop elements and then cover the advances of the "Das Reich" and "Totenkopf" Divisions to the south and southwest of Kharkov. Ultimately, the entire SS-Panzer Corps – with the aforementioned three divisions – attacked to the north, wheeled to the south and then recaptured Kharkov on 14 March 1943 in a resolutely carried out pincers operation.

#### The Capture of Belgorod on 18 March 1943

The Leibstandarte was employed against Belgorod, lying to the north of Kharkov, in order to throw the withdrawing enemy forces back across the Donez. If this attack was a success, then it would be possible to establish a front line along the Donez.

17 March 1943, 1230 hours. The III. Bataillon launched an attack, passing through the I. Bataillon. Because of extremely bad road conditions, it reached the Shurawkowka – Kassatschjalopan Road at nightfall, then covered to the north. At 1700 hours the II. Bataillon had taken Shurawkowka and covered it outskirts. The III. Bataillon established contact with the II. Bataillon. 1

Peiper's Panzergruppe, along with the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 under SS-Untersturmführer von Ribbentrop, ran into a Pakfront south of Nechotejewka. It was penetrated as darkness fell. The entire SPW-Bataillon fought at Hill 215.3.<sup>2</sup> SS-Untersturmführer Gührs and SS-Untersturmführer Margait, platoon leaders in the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie's cannon and antitank gun platoons respectively, observed the attack together. Shortly before, Margait had been able to bail out of his knocked out SPW unharmed. Gührs wrote.<sup>3</sup>:

As was almost always the case, Margait was without a helmet. There were two Russian tanks at a considerable distance in front of us. A high-explosive shell went off right in front of us. Margait was hit in the head with shrapnel. I took him to cover in a bunker. They were able to give him first aid, and he was taken to the rear that same evening.

Belgorod remained the objective for the attacking elements of the LAH and the army division "Großdeutschland". "Großdeutschland" had the mission to advance east with a Panzergruppe from Borissowka to block the Belgorod – Kharkov highway and railway. In a private conversation with his friend, SS-Sturmbannführer Rolf Lehmann, the Leibstandarte's operations officer, Peiper called this action the "race for Belgorod".4

On 18 March 1943 – a bright, sunny day – the reinforced SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 assembled for the attack after sending the SPW-Bataillon out on reconnaissance. In the evening Peiper was sent two Tigers. There was a Stuka attack on the

Russian security line at Krestowo – Kaumowka at 0700 hours and, ten minutes later, Peiper reported that he had broken through it and was advancing to Otradnyj Hill.

18 March 1943, 0415. The III. Bataillon carried out the reconnaissance as ordered. At 0830 hours the battalions launched the attack. The III. Bataillon's attack made rapid progress. The enemy was completely surprised and large numbers fled. 1000 hours: The III. Bataillon reached Krassnaja Niwa. 1100 hours: Bataillon Peiper was eight kilometers east of Belgorod and, on its own initiative, advanced far beyond the objective of its attack to Belgorod. At 1130 hours it took Belgorod in a surprise attack and the main body of the battalion was given the mission to cover Belgorod to the north and west.<sup>5</sup>

Peiper's surprising success was initially greeted at division and corps headquarters with astonished disbelief. This is how SS-Untersturmführer Gührs of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie experienced the surprising capture of Belgorod.

18 March 1943. Bright, clear sky. Snow. Peiper met early with the company commanders and myself (as commander of the cannon platoon) and informed us that several divisions of the Waffen-SS along with Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Großdeutschland" were to attack Belgorod. He then reported that he had been over at the Stuka command post, where he was promised an attack on the Russian roadblock in front of us at 0700 hours. The battalion was to get ready and, exploiting the surprise, push forward along the road through the Russian main lines. There were two or three Tigers with us. We wanted to break through to Belgorod. I was to bring up the rear with my cannon platoon.

Everything went as planned. We made it through. By radio, Peiper urged the lead elements to top speed. The Russians rubbed their eyes. Their tanks were still under cover. They were laying wires and apparently involved in their morning routine as we drove through the villages toward Belgorod. I didn't know how it was going up front, as our column was fairly long. But we didn't stop. The Russians gradually figured out what was going on, and I saw the first Russian tanks chasing us from the rear at very long range. But we were moving at considerable speed. Through a depression and across a bridge, we then arrived in Belgorod - taking everyone by surprise. I later heard that our first radio message to division was received with disbelief: "Heavy house-to-house fighting in Belgorod". Second message: "Belgorod firmly in our hands". I wasn't there when the divisional commander arrived in the Storch because I had to cover the bridge to our rear with my platoon.<sup>6</sup>

Peiper attempted to send a radio message at 1135 hours: "Belgorod has been captured by surprise. Eight tanks destroyed".

It was only passed on after a few difficulties had been overcome. Immediately after taking the city, he ordered his adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Dinse, to radio this report. However, Dinse couldn't make contact. So he used a radio in the vehicle of a war reporter who was accompanying the attack.<sup>8</sup>

After the SPW-Bataillon had pushed into Belgorod, the commander of the 11. Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, pushed immediately forward to the bank of the Donez and blocked all the river crossings.

The Soviets soon launched tank counterattacks, which were repelled by the 11. Kompanie and its attached antitank guns and

tanks. It destroyed six enemy tanks and numerous guns. In fierce house-to-house fighting, the 11. Kompanie took the eastern outskirts of Belgorod which were especially threatened. SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl was wounded and SS-Unterscharführer Reint Stomberg of his company was killed. The gunner in SS-Unterscharführer Modes' Tiger from the 4. (schwere)/ SS-Panzer Regiment 1 reported:

A Panzer IV up in front of us and then our Tiger. We had hardly gotten going and had just left the forward edge of friendly lines behind us when we detected two well camouflaged T-34's hiding in ambush. We swung our turret and took these T-34's under fire.

Our shells were on target and this cost the Soviet tanks their cover and their lives. When they tried to escape we destroyed them. They hardly had any opportunity to return our fire.

Our tank engine continued to thunder and our tracks gripped the Ukrainian soil and propelled us forward. Then a close reconnaissance aircraft (Henschel HS 126) flew low over us and signaled us. He dropped a smoke container with the message that even more Soviet tanks were swinging into our attack sector. This message increased our watchfulness. After the last engagement, our Tiger had taken over the lead position, which required special alertness. As we made a surprise entrance into the next village, the advance route made a slight bend to the right. We couldn't believe our eyes. There was an enemy 7.62 cm antitank gun (Ratsch-bum) in position in front of us. We had appeared so unexpectedly, that the Red Army men weren't standing by their gun. Instead, they were seated on a bench at a nearby hut and were flirting with the girls of the village.

We didn't even have to shoot. Without much deliberation, we rolled over the gun at full speed and it no longer presented much danger to us, as it was now only worth scrap metal. As we continued on our way, we ran into two more T-34's which we destroyed without much problem. To the left of the road there was a broad expanse covered with hundreds of Red Army men falling back, driven by the fear of being rolled up by our rapid advance. They ran with fluttering coats as if to escape some approaching doom. We didn't bother with what was going on to the right or left of us, and concentrated completely on moving at top speed toward the objective of our attack, which was Belgorod.

The clock approached 1130 hours, it was getting close to noon, when Belgorod appeared in front of us. We couldn't read the sign, as none of us could read the Cyrillic letters, but that could be – had to be – the city of Belgorod which we were supposed to take by surprise. Coming from the southwest, we carefully drove across a wooden bridge, but it held up well under our tank, and entered Belgorod headed to the north. Two SPW followed, covering us. Almost at the far end of the city, we heard: "Tank to the rear!" The SPW crews left their SPW and took cover in the road ditch. Our commander ordered: "Turret 6 o'clock!". We immediately swung the turret, since the Soviet tank had approached to about 200 meters. Our first shot was a direct hit, since the tank was a "General Grant" model (as provided by the Americans). With such a high silhouette, it was hard to miss.

After destroying this tank, we received a radio message which told us that enemy tanks were firing on our ammunition carriers and other vehicles following us along the route of our advance. We were to ensure that this route remained open under all circumstances. With our tracks tearing up the now softened road, we turned back immediately. As we approached the wooden bridge, there was a T-34 some 300 meters behind it which was completely blocking the road. We immediately began to fire. We hit the engine compartment so that the tank began to smoke. In spite of the hit, the T-34 calmly returned our fire. However, our next round was so well-aimed that the enemy's gun was silenced and the fuss was over. The road was once again open. In the meantime, a second Tiger from our company rolled up. It had just cleared the Rollbahn, and any vehicle could now drive on to Belgorod without danger. The city was finally taken and our mission accomplished. 10

SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler witnessed the battle described above between the Tiger and the T-34 on the wooden bridge:

"In addition to the T-34, I also saw a KW I and a KW II on the edge of the town. Both tanks got away. Our SPW, which was located between the bridge and the Tiger, had an engine breakdown. During the exchange of fire our SPW was hit and Unterscharführer Bussacker and I were wounded by shrapnel"."

At 1700 hours the III. Bataillon made contact with the "Das Reich" Division. At 19:35 hours Peiper radioed his regiment:

"Enemy losses: 10 T-34's, 1 T-40, 1 T-60, 2 General Lee's, 10 7.62 cm guns, 6 4.7 cm antitank guns, 14 antitank rifles, 18 heavy machine guns, 34 light machine guns, 38 trucks, several sleigh columns destroyed, and different types of flame-throwers. Our losses: One killed, six wounded".<sup>12</sup>

Once again, Peiper's lightning-fast appreciation of the situation in front of Belgorod and his subsequent exploitation had given the division a victory which would not have been so easily achieved even a little later. On the following day, Peiper was relieved by other units in Belgorod.

19 March 1943. During the morning, the II. Bataillon took over the security duties of the III. Bataillon. 1200 hours: Bataillon Peiper given the mission to advance west to establish contact with the "Großdeutschland" Division. 1315 hours: III. Bataillon moved out and reached Strelezkoje at 1355 hours. It destroyed seven tanks in fierce tank fighting. The bridge was destroyed by the enemy and the battalion spent the night in Strelezkoje.<sup>13</sup>

SS-Unterscharführer Bott's SPW took a direct hit in Strelezkoje, and radioman Thier and driver Funke were wounded. Along with the two Tigers, Peiper's Bataillon was reinforced by the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 under SS-Untersturmführer Rudolf von Ribbentrop, who remembered:

On that day the Panzergruppe had to carry out a reconnaissance sweep to the north. One or two Tigers and a few SPW were advancing in front of my company. As we emerged from a small patch of woods, the lead elements were hit by an artillery attack. An SPW was hit and immediately burst into flames. As the Panzergruppe really didn't have a combat mission, it pulled back behind the patch of woods. Jochen Peiper commented: "Well, there's nothing to be gained here today!" Then suddenly, directing his question to the tank crews, he asked who was ready to go back again and see if anyone was left alive from the SPW crew and, if so, bring him back. I heard the commander of the SPW was an Oberscharführer who had been with Peiper for a long time. I then volunteered with my Panzer IV and drove back to the burning SPW. As I was sure that we would be shelled again when my tank appeared, I jumped out of my tank myself and carefully examined the burning SPW and the dead men lying around it to the extent possible to see if there had been any survivors. I was able to pick up a few pay books and some dog tags and, in this way, assure Peiper that the entire crew of the vehicle had been killed. I could see how much Peiper valued an exact report, as he thanked me very sincerely.<sup>15</sup>

From the battalion war diaries:

20 March 1943, 0600 hours. III. Bataillon launched a feint attack to the north. 0845 hours: III. Bataillon reached the bridge west of Schopino, wiped out the extremely stubborn enemy defense and, after repairing the bridge, advanced on Kolh – Smelok – Trudu. 1200 hours: In accordance with its orders, Kampfgruppe Peiper pulled back again and, at 1400 hours, reached Oskotschnoje and Satschnewkolodes. It screened to the north from there, with the left flank making contact with the II. Bataillon. 16

The SPW-Bataillon was attacked by Russian close-support aircraft while there.<sup>17</sup> They fired into the SPW with their on-board cannons. SS-Hauptsturmführer Georg Bormann, commander of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie, was wounded.

"21 March 1943. III. Bataillon established contact with the "Großdeutschland" Division at Nowaja Glinka west of Tomarowk".<sup>18</sup>

22 to 26 March, was spent pulling covering force and reconnaissance duty. At 1430 hours on 26 March 1943 all elements of the SPW-Bataillon were relieved and moved to their new assembly area, which the last elements reached on 29 March. This activity ended the operations at Kharkov. The fierce defensive fighting and the subsequent offensive action had been a great success for the Leibstandarte. Many of its brave soldiers had made the supreme sacrifice in this fighting for the protection of their homeland and for the future of Europe: their lives.

The supreme commander of the German Wehrmacht, Adolf Hitler, honored the incomparable accomplishments of the German Landser with an Order of the Day:

Weeks ago, in one of the most serious crises of this war, whose cause we all know, I had to ask you to stubbornly defend every square meter of ground to give me the time needed to bring new organizations and new weapons to the front, necessary for the final destruction of the Soviet onslaught. Because of the self-sacrificing actions of countless officers and men, and thanks to superior leadership, it has been possible to meet these prerequisites. It has become increasingly difficult for the Soviets to push forward – the empty areas rapidly filling with improvised units or new German divisions – and this means that the enemy is increasingly running into tougher resistance.

Finally the time for just holding on was over, and the time to counterattack had arrived. New Army and Waffen-SS divisions were led into battle together with the proven soldiers of the Army and the Waffen-SS already in the east. Their combined fierce attacks and the continuous heroic operations of the Luftwaffe have now smashed the enemy at the most critical positions along the front. Kharkov is once again in our hands. Numerous dead and prisoners and untold amounts of captured materials are the outward signs of our success. But more importantly, the Soviets' intention to break through Kharkov to Dneiperopetrowsk has been finally shattered. The Soviets have been unable to bring their winter campaign to a successful conclusion in spite of every attempt to shake or even break through the German front by attacking other positions. In the final analysis, their plans ran

aground on the toughness of the German soldier. For this I thank you, not only as your supreme commander, but most of all in the name of the German people, in the name of our common homeland, which you are defending and protecting. By your courage and the change it brought to the our fortunes on the battlefield, you yourselves did what had to be done, so that today I can lift the ban on leave again, and now you, my comrades, in increasing numbers will be able to visit once again our homeland and your loved ones, whose thoughts, hopes, and prayers this winter have been with you more than ever.

Signed: Adolf Hitler 19

The men of Peiper's SPW-Bataillon were in close combat in the following places during the fighting at Kharkov. These are the confirmed close-combat days for the companies listed:<sup>20</sup>

Date	Location	Units
7 February 1943	Andrejewka	11. Kompanie
8 February 1943	Skripai	Staff, 11., 12., 13. Komp.
13 February 1943	Wodanoje	Staff, 11., 13., 14. Komp.
15 February 1943	Ossnova	Staff, 11., 13., 14. Komp.
17 February 1943	Babei	Staff, 12. Komp.
19 February 1943	Ziglerowka	Staff, 13. Komp.
19 February 1943	Kasatschij-Ma	idan Staff, 11., 12. Komp.
19 February 1943	Jeremejewk	Staff, 11., 12. Komp.
24 February 1943	Sachnowtchin	Staff, 12. Komp.
28 February 1943	Rassochowatje	Staff, 11., 13. Komp.
2 March 1943	Logwiny	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.		
3 March 1943	Petscheiwka	Staff, 11., 12. Komp.
4 March 1943	Stanitschnoje	Staff, 11., 12., 13. Komp.
6 March 1943	Federowka	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.		
8 March 1943	Hf. Rewtschik	Staff, 11., 12., 13. Komp.
9 March 1943	Ljubotin	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.		
12 March 1943	Kharkov	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.		
13 March 1943	Kharkov	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.		
14 March 1943	Kharkov	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.	11:11 015 0	S. 65 11 12 12 14
17 March 1943	Hill 215.3	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp. 18 March 1943	Dalgarad	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.	Belgorod	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
19 March 1943	Strelezkoje	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.	Suciezkoje	Starr, 11., 12., 15., 14.
20 March 1943	Schopino	Staff, 11., 12., 13., 14.
Komp.	Schopino	Juli, 11., 12., 15., 17.
<b>. .</b>		

# Rest, Refitting and Training: 29 March to 4 July 1943

On 1 April 1943 the combat strength of the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 consisted of 66 officers, 358 noncommissioned officers, and 2095 men.<sup>1</sup> After the III. Bataillon had stayed in Kharkov, it moved to Klenowoje after Easter 1943. After the severe losses the Leibstandarte had taken in the fighting

for Kharkov, it had to detach personnel for the formation of its sister division "Hitlerjugend" and as headquarters personnel for the I. SS-Panzer-Korps "Leibstandarte".

It was planned to bring both divisions together to form the I. SS-Panzer-Korps. In Peiper's battalion there were also a number of personnel changes.

Since the beginning of April 1943 SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Babick had commanded the 12. (gep.) Kompanie. He was replaced by SS-Untersturmführer Georg Preuß, who previously had been a platoon leader in the 13. (gep.) Kompanie. On 10 April 1943 the former commander of the headquarters company, SS-Hauptsturmführer Siegfried Wandt, took over command of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, whose commander, SS-Obersturmführer Otto Pinse, then took over the headquarters company. On 13 April 1943 SS-Untersturmführer David Margait, platoon leader of the antitank gun platoon of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie died in mobile field hospital 3/685 of the wounds that he had suffered on 17 March. SS-Hauptscharführer Jochen Thiele took over his platoon. On 26 April 1943 Peiper named SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs to command the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie. 2 The previous commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Kolitz, was transferred out to command the trains for the "Hitlerjugend" Division. SS-Oberscharführer Haferstroh, the combat engineer platoon leader of the company, returned after his convalescence. SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Babick and SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern became platoon leaders in the 11. Kompanie. SS-Untersturmführer Günther Hülsen replaced SS-Obersturmführer Möhrlin as orderly officer. SS-Untersturmführer Hans Mahneke remained as the communications officer.

On 20 April 1943 the companies of the SPW-Bataillon were assembled to receive decorations won during the Kharkov fighting. Jochen Peiper handed out the Iron Cross 1st Class to: SS-Untersturmführer Dietrich Schmidt and SS-Untersturmführer Fritz Stamm of the 11. Kompanie; SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Babick, commander of the 12. Kompanie and SS-Unterscharführer Rudi Kuhfuß, medic in the 12. Kompanie; SS-Sturmmann Hans Paulsen and SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Thumeyer of the 13. Kompanie; and to SS-Sturmmann Albert Krüger of the combat engineer platoon of the 14. Kompanie. The Iron Cross 2nd Class was awarded to SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt and to 36 additional noncommissioned officers and men. Five Iron Crosses, 2nd Class had been previously awarded in the battalion on 15 April 1943. The following men received the Panzerkampfabzeichen (Tank Combat Badge) in Bronze: the four Untersturmführer and platoon leaders of the 13. Kompanie -Georg Preuß, Kurt Thumeyer, Heinz Tomhardt, and Joachim Kaden; in the 11. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Karl Döring and SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern; in the 12. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt; and, in addition, the communications officer, SS-Untersturmführer Hans Mahneke, and the surgeons, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Robert Brüstle and SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Friedrich Breme. Altogether, there were 361 Panzerkampfabzeichen in Bronze distributed to officers, noncommissioned officers and men in the SPW-Bataillon on that day.3

On the same day, SS-Untersturmführer Georg Preuß and Rudolf Möhrlin were promoted to SS-Obersturmführer and the assistant surgeon, Dr. Friedrich Breme, and the maintenance company commander, Alfred Bloch, became reserve SS-Obersturmführer.

The SPW-Bataillon received new personnel from the Leibstandarte's replacement battalion, and additional replacements arrived in the form of former members of the Luftwaffe who had been transferred to the Waffen-SS. In addition to barely trained recruits, there were also noncommissioned officers up to the rank of Oberfeldwebel among them. A decorated pilot from a Stuka squadron who already had the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the combat pilot's badge went to the 12. (gep.) Kompanie. The noncommissioned officer had flown under a bridge with his JU 87 during an attack on England and was transferred as a result.<sup>4</sup> Most of the former Luftwaffe personnel otherwise had no front-line experience.

The collection point for equipment captured by SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was set up at the SPW-Bataillon's weapons repair workshop.<sup>5</sup> A noncommissioned officer course was given in Olschany under the supervision of SS-Obersturmführer Preuß. New camouflage uniforms arrived – green-and-brown flecked coveralls, smocks and caps. The entire SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was quartered in villages near Kharkov, rolling country broken by patches of woods and small lakes, which gave the men welcome opportunities for bathing. Jochen Peiper lived in a small hut with a Russian couple, as did many of the battalion's company commanders.<sup>6</sup> The living room was white washed with family photos on the walls; holy pictures and an icon were in one corner.

The division ordered a five-week training program, which was to be followed by a second, in order to transform the new replacements into worthwhile frontline soldiers. Battalion-level exercises were also carried out with armor and artillery support. On 30 April 1943 the entire 2. Regiment performed its duties while wearing gas masks.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of May the Reichsführer SS visited the Leibstandarte and, while there, observed a tank company firing exercise, visited the armor repair facility in Kharkov and also visited the SPW-Bataillon where he had a conversation with Peiper, his former adjutant. In Kharkov he spoke in front of some of the officers of the II. SS-Panzer-Korps, whose divisions he also visited. Starting 5 May 1943 there was an increase in night exercises and field firing exercises.

On 6 May 1943 Jochen Peiper was decorated with the German Cross in Gold for his accomplishments in February 1943. Sepp Dietrich had submitted him for the award on 26 February 1943. This meant that Peiper had received one of the highest awards for bravery after having received the Knight's Cross. On 8 May 1943 Sepp Dietrich invited his commanders to an informal gettogether, at which the war and personal interests were discussed.

On 16 May 1943 SS-Sturmbannführer Hugo Kraas took over command of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. He became an SS-Obersturmbannführer on 21 June. Likewise, Albert Frey took over SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and also became SS-Obersturmbannführer on 21 June 1943. On 17 May 1943 there was a regimental chemical gas protection course, to which the SPW-Bataillon sent its chemical gas defense officer and one officer and noncommissioned officer per company. On 15 May 1943 a new 19. (Pionier-) Kompanie was formed in SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, to which the engineer platoons of the regiment's headquarters company, the 5. (schwere gepanzerte) and

the 10. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanien were assigned. The 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie retained its engineer platoon, however.<sup>11</sup>

The officers being transferred from the Leibstandarte to the "Hitlerjugend" Division and the I. SS-Panzer-Korps were given a formal send-off from the division on 28 May 1943, on the occasion of Sepp Dietrich's birthday. Along with the commanding general of the II. SS-Panzer-Korps, SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, SS-Brigadeführer Prieß, SS-Gruppenführer Gille and the commander of Panzer-Regiment "Großdeutschland", Oberst Graf Strachwitz – an SS-Standartenführer in the Allgemeine-SS – all took part in the birthday ceremony. The entire I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 under SS-Sturmbannführer Wünsche was transferred to the "Hitlerjugend" Division; it handed over its tanks to the II. Bataillon before leaving.

On 1 June 1943 SS-Oberscharführer Bernd von Bergmann and Walter Tafener were transferred to the SPW-Bataillon. They were graduates of the officer candidate schools and considered reserve office cadets (Reserveführeranwärter or RFA). Reserve SS-Untersturmführer Rudi Wetzel returned to the 11. Kompanie after his convalescence. The division was visited by theater groups to entertain the troops. For Pentecost, a Russian pianist and several soloists from Kharkov played for the assembled staff of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.

On 15 June 1943 the former leader of the infantry gun platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Noth, took over the 16. (IG)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. His platoon - with all its vehicles, guns, and equipment – became a part of the 16. Kompanie on the same day.<sup>13</sup> A replacement platoon was formed in its place in the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie with six "Grillen" (Crickets). The Grille was a 15 cm infantry gun on the 38(t) tank chassis. Peiper had SS-Untersturmführer Otto Bölck transferred from the heavy platoon of the 12. Kompanie to the 14. to take over the platoon. Bölck requested SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler, Rudi Rayer and Gerhard Kendzia from the heavy machine gun section of the 12. Kompanie as Grille gun commanders. Bölck's assistant platoon leader was SS-Oberscharführer RFA Bernd von Bergmann. He, Bölck, and SS-Hauptscharführer Otto Woelky (of the 16. (IG) Kompanie) trained the Grille Platoon in Olschany.14

The Grille was equipped with the 15 cm Infantry Gun 33/1 L 12 on the Panzer 38(t). It was 2.40 meters high and 4.61 meters long; it weighed 11.5 metric tons and had a top speed of 35 kilometers an hour. A five-man crew was required. The gunner was provided with the model 36 panoramic sight. The first complement of Grillen in the Leibstandarte's SPW-Bataillon were provided with radios, but later models didn't have them. The IG Platoon of six Grillen had significant firepower.

On 20 June 1943 the Panzerkampfabzeichen in Bronze was awarded again, a total of 24 in the SPW-Bataillon.<sup>15</sup> On this day, in the presence of SS-Obergruppenführer Hausser, a radio exercise took place for the division's Panzergruppe, to which the III. Bataillon and the tank regiment belonged. The tank regiment only had one battalion at the time.

During June 1943 Peiper was able to go home on leave to his wife and children, Hinrich and Elke. On 25 June 1943 a frontline book dealer was made available to the 2. Regiment, and each battalion sent an officer to make purchases. At an orders group at the 4. Panzer-Armee after his return, Peiper demonstrated his

tactical and operational understanding and his ability to use it to develop a plan with lightning speed. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs:

I had seen him before at operational conferences, as in the orders group at army before the battle of Kursk, an assembly of some 60 officers. Peiper and I were the only SS-officers. When the Army's operations officer had finished presenting the order and asked if anyone had anything more to add, Peiper volunteered. He was given the pointer. He went to the map and proposed a new plan which was immediately adopted. The man was simply a genius.<sup>17</sup>

The battalion adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, went on leave at the end of June and the 20-year-old SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff from Memel of the 11. Kompanie became Peiper's new adjutant. From 21 to 27 June 1943 exercises were carried out at the company and battalion level. Officer training took place using war games on the sand table and on maps. Noncommissioned officer and officer training was pushed. In the SPW-Bataillon duty began at sunrise, so that the men could rest during the noon heat.

During this training period the division couldn't get any fuel for exercises, so that the units had to divert gas from current allotments. Combined exercises with the heavy weapons suffered from this. Peiper's SPW-Bataillon, the Panzer-Regiment and the II./SS-Artillerie-Regiment 1, refitted with self-propelled guns – "Wespe" and "Hummel" (Wasps and Bumble Bees) – made up the division's Panzergruppe. SS-Unterscharführer Hellmuth Franke of the 4. (gep.) Batterie of the artillery regiment commented:

The months of May and June were filled up with gunlaying and combat exercises, as we first had to get acquainted with the Wespe. For a long time things were screwed up. For example, we only got intercoms and radio equipment shortly before going into battle, so that during gun drills commands to the individual guns in firing position had to be given, not over the radio, but orally or by hand signal. It must have looked funny. The crew sat up on top of the Wespe and the platoon leader stood to the rear within shouting distance on the ground. But that meant that the gun commanders had little opportunity to get used to the new form of firing commands using radio contact with the battery commander, battery officer or platoon leader or to use the intercom with the driver. An additional lack of preparation was that coordination with the Panzergrenadiere in the SPW and, above all, with the tanks, simply could not be practiced, probably because the fuel had to be saved for combat.19

The following officer candidates were detached from the SPW-Bataillon for the preparatory course for the 11th Wartime Cadet Course at the Bad Tölz Junkerschule: SS-Rottenführer Willi Gebhardt (section leader for the communications section) and SS-Rottenführer Helmut Grupp (radioman); SS-Sturmmänner Werner Halm, Heinrich Stahl and Friedrich Faubel and SS-Rottenführer Friedrich Hertelt from the 11. Kompanie; Hans Fabritius from the 12. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Wolfgang Aumüller and Wilhelm Kieninger and SS-Sturmmänner Karl Cramer and Nikolaus Hausladen from the 13. Kompanie. SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Stamm from the 11. Kompanie (who had already won the Iron Cross 1st Class) was transferred to the SS-Panzer-Ersatz-Regiment (Replacement regiment). He was killed in action as a platoon leader in a King Tiger of the 1./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung

101.20

The following men of the battalion were transferred to the 10th Wartime Cadet Course on 21 June 1943: SS-Oberscharführer Dietrich Schmidt from the 11. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Friedrich Reiner and Hans-Jürgen Kühn of the 12. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Heinrich Liebmann from the 13. Kompanie; and, SS-Unterscharführer Otto Rosin and Heinrich Thole from the antitank gun platoon of the 14. Kompanie.<sup>21</sup> Heinrich Thole was also a SS-Standartenführer in the Allgemeine-SS.

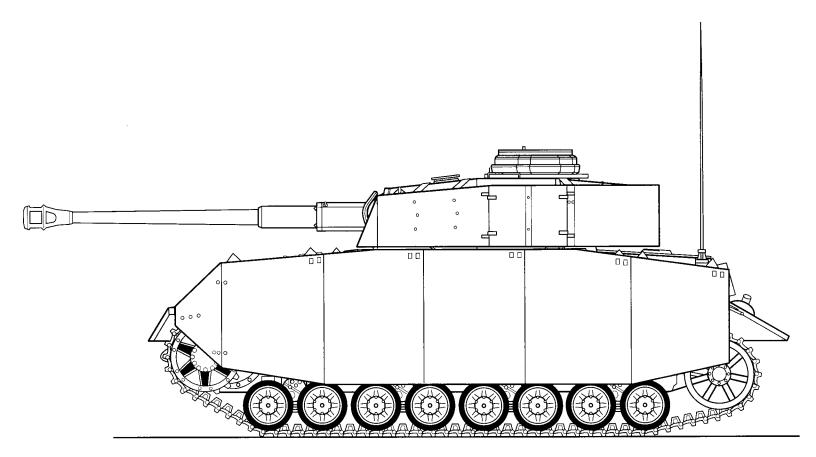
During this carefree period in Klenowoje the battalion put on a sporting competition which everyone enjoyed. Peiper's men dreamed up many interesting things such as a mounted obstacle course, where contestants had to drive through water hazards in amphibious vehicles. There was a football tournament, for which the players geared up. The steel helmeted referee was put in a difficult position, for when it looked like someone was going to score a goal, a smoke grenade was thrown into the penalty area to hinder the attacker's shot.

There was even a war reporter to photograph this spectacle and his photos later appeared back home. The relations between the men and the inhabitants in and around Klenowoje were extremely good. The men gave their clothes to the women to be washed and gave them rations in exchange. The battalion surgeon provided the same medical care to the Ukrainians as to his own men.

The company commander, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, had his own quite personal memories of the Ukrainian village of Klenowoje.

I had my room in the mayor's house. He had an 18-year-old daughter, Lydia. After some initial hesitation, we had long conversations about love of country and this awful war, in which we were all losers. She was a very well educated Ukrainian, spoke perfect German, was a dazzling beauty, and her ability at the piano impressed me. During the warm summer evenings we often talked until late in the night. We would sit by the lake in Klenowoje, and a very tender romance developed between a patriotic Ukrainian girl and a 23-year-old SS-Untersturmführer. One day in the room where I was staying, Lydia showed up with an old woman, who was clad in makeshift clothes of jute sacks and whose feet were wrapped in the same material. She was extremely upset by what she had to translate. Men of the company, completely unaware of her poverty, had taken a couple of her rags to clean a gun. Naturally I was very sorry. I had the men report to me and required that they make amends. They provided the old woman with bread and wool blankets, which made her happy.

After this incident, Lydia – who had regarded this as a deep humiliation for her people – disappeared for a couple of days. Her father couldn't or wouldn't give me any information about her absence. On some days, I assumed that she had gone to the Russian partisans in the nearby woods. I discovered four days in advance from her when we were supposed to occupy our next assembly area!<sup>22</sup>



**PzKpfw IV, Ausf H** Courtesy of George Bradford



The rail shipments of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 arrived at the Eastern front during the first weeks of February 1943. Here a train with the SPW of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie. One can clearly see the additional armor plate mounted on the front of the vehicle.



Commander's call with platoon leaders of the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 on 6 February 1943 at Skripai, just before their first action. From the left: SS-Untersturmführer Tomhardt and Thumeyer (who was wounded that evening during the attack on Andrejewka), SS-Obersturmführer Pinter (company commander) and SS-Untersturmführer Kaden.



The company headquarters section SPW for the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 with deep-frozen rations (sometime before 10 February 1943).



Reception of the 320. Infanterie-Division on 12 February 1943 by Peiper's battalion. In these photos, the army grenadiers are being met by the 13. (gep.) Kompanie.



Jochen Peiper in a SPW during an engagement. He is wearing his headphones and observing in the direction of the attack.





The whitewashed SPW of the Leibstandarte in the Russian winter.



SPW and armored cars of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 rolling toward the enemy. One can see the tactical sign for the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 on the left and that of the regiment on the right.



February 1943, a SPW of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie immediately after taking a village. Jupp Krebs in the center and SS-Sturmann Hermann Dähne on the right.





Peiper (top) and Bormann (center) determine the avenue of approach before the attack.



"Attack axes are established for the attack on Konstantinograd" was the original caption for this picture provided by SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff. Guhl on the left in a winter overcoat and Wolff on the right wearing a visor cap.



SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff and the squad leaders of the 3rd platoon of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie while being briefed by SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl (left) before the reconnaissance-in-force to Konstantinograd toward the "Totenkopf" Division. From the left: Unterscharführer Erich Bliesener (behind Guhl), Max Rode, Wolff, Willi Bott, Egon Wernisch and Willi Dirla, the company headquarters section leader.



Jochen Peiper with Möhrlin, his orderly (right), and SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, the cannon platoon leader of the 14.(s. gep.) Kompanie (far right). In the back: SS-Hauptsturmführer Bormann. To the left: SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Robert Brüstle.



Peiper's SPW-Bataillon during a short rest halt. Tanks were attached for support during this attack. The SPW on the right displays an identification flag for aircraft.



Advance in the Ukranian snow. SS-Untersturmführer Möhrlin and, on the right, SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Wolfgang Rabe, the field surgeon for the Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung.



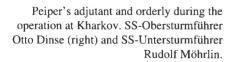
Peiper's last salute to SS-Obersturmführer Lux Westrup. Westrup had been killed in action on 24 February 1943 and was buried in Kassnograd on 26 February 1943. He had been the commander of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie. To the left: SS-Untersturmführer Margait and Bloch and SS-Obersturmführer Molt.



Jochen Peiper and Otto Dinse, his adjutant (right), at Westrup's grave.



The SPW-Bataillon at the beginning of March 1943 while advancing to the north. In front, Peiper's orderly, SS-Untersturmführer Rudolf Möhrlin.







Peiper's last orders before an attack. Peiper on the right with SS-Hauptsturmführer Bormann and Guhl (second from left).



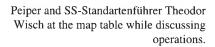
SPW from the 2nd Platoon of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie. From the left: SS-Unterscharführer Reint Stomberg and August Schirmag, SS-Rottenführer Erwin Wrede and Heinz Freyer (far right).



The regimental commander, SS-Standartenführer Theodor Wisch, at Peiper's command post. SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl (right) places a telephone call.



Jochen Peiper in the middle of operational planning with his regimental commander, SS-Standartenführer Theodor Wisch (right).







The commander of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl (left) could always be found up front during operations.



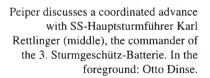
Guhl watches through his binoculars.



The Command SPW of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Untersturmführer Hans Schmidt discusses final details with officers of the Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung before the attack. Left, rear: SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse. Right: SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl.







The first gun section of the 3./Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung LAH advancing. It was assigned to Peiper.



SPW roll towards the enemy. Assault guns on the right.



Panzer IV of the Leibstandarte in February 1943.



Panzergrenadiere of 10./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in February 1943.



Jochen Peiper with maps during a briefing of his company commanders.



Jochen Peiper dictates orders for the companies to his adjutant. Otto Dinse.



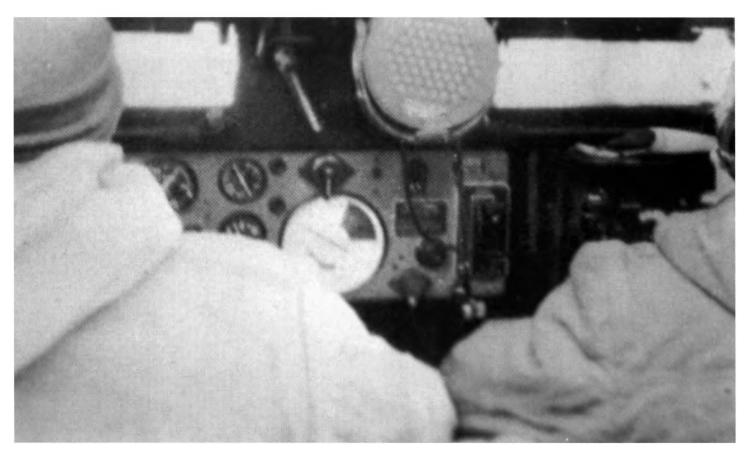
Peiper in the SPW; Guhl, Dinse and Bormann on the ground.



Final guidance before the attack. Jochen Peiper on board his SPW (wearing the dark hood); SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl stands in front of him. Next to Guhl are Dinse, Möhrlin and Bormann.



Knocked-out T-34 and men of the 10./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



The interior of a SPW – driver on the left, radioman on the right.



The commander's pennant for III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Standartenführer Theodor Wisch visits the command post of Peiper's SPW-Battalion. A guidepost for the command post can be seen in the background. Peiper's command post was located in a typical Ukrainian house.



Assault guns from the 3. Batterie of SS-Hauptsturmführer Rettlinger were attached to Peiper's SPW-Battalion. Here taking a short rest halt.



Jochen Peiper during the planning for an operation with his regimental commander, SS-Standartenführer Theodor Wisch.



Standartenführer Theodor Wisch visits Jochen Peiper.



SS-Panzergrenadier Karl Menne of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie. The front of the vehicle has been reinforced with track links.



Jochen Peiper (right) briefs a liason officer. Next to Peiper is SS-Sturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, commander of the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1. Peiper's adjutant, SS-Obersturmbannführer Otto Dinse, is on the left.



SPW-Battalion command post in February 1943. SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper (middle), SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl (far right) and SS-Untersturmführer Rudolf Möhrlin (standing), Peiper's orderly.



Horst Reifland, Erwin Wrede and unknown soldier of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Georg Bormann (right), who commanded the 12. (gep.) Kompanie in March 1943, on a SPW with a 3.7 cm antitank cannon.



SS-Sturmmann Kuno Balz, 13. (gep.) Kompanie. Sandbags have been placed next to the machine-gun shield for protection against shrapnel.



Operational planning.



SS-Unterscharführer August Schirmag of the 11. Kompanie.



SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, Peiper's battalion adjutant.



SS-Panzergrenadier Fritz Schuster, 12. (gep.) Kompanie, killed in action in November 1943.



The Fedorowka-Walki sector, 6 March 1943. Assault guns of the 3. Batterie of SS-Hauptsturmführer Rettlinger which were attached to Peiper. They proved to be dependable help.



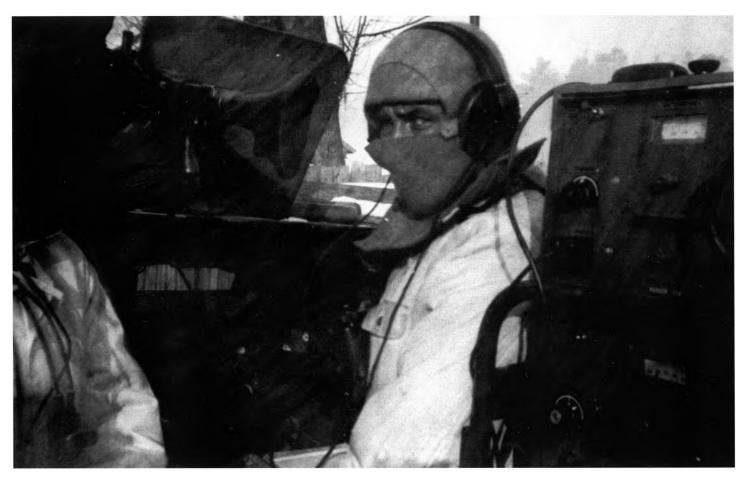
On 6 March 1943 Peiper's Battalion established a bridgehead at Federowka, for which he was awarded the Knight's Cross on 9 March 1943. To the right, SS-Obersturmführer Dinse in his adjutant's SPW.



6 March 1943. SPW crews of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie at Federowka. SS-Sturmmann Erich Schöbel asks directions from a Ukrainian woman. SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff on the left.



Assault guns and the SPW-Bataillon advancing on Federowka on 6 March 1943.



SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Nüske on board his command vehicle (14. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1). In November 1943 he became Peiper's adjutant in the armor regiment.



Snapshot taken during one of Peiper's masterly executed night attacks.





SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse (right) in his adjutant's SPW, recognizable by its extensive radio equipment and the antennae.

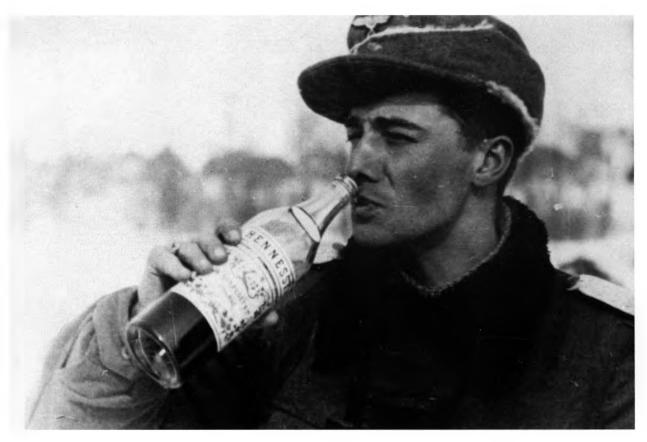
Leibstandarte SPW: its crew is moving into the attack.



SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, Peiper's adjutant, sits in the snow and Peiper bends his cap. The occasion for the frivolity and the alcohol is not known. SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl (left), von Westernhagen (right) and Bormann.



Jochen Peiper with SS-Sturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen, the commander of the Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung of the LAH.



Snapshot of Peiper.



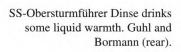
Peiper, von Westernhagen and Dinse.



 $SS-Haupt sturm f \ddot{u}hrer\ Paul\ Guhl\ and \\ Dinse\ (right).$ 



Jochen Peiper and his adjutant, Otto Dinse.







SS-Rottenführer Karl Übler (12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Stamm of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie.



SS-Rottenführer Günther Gaul of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie.



SS-Rottenführer Heinz Freyer of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie. Here seen as a SS-Unterscharführer.



March 1943, just outside Kharkov.



The 3. Batterie of the Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung of the LAH was attached occassionally to Peiper's battalion during February and March 1943. Here, the commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Rettlinger, in the commander's cupola.



Walki was taken on 7 March 1943.



SPW of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie on 7 March 1943 at Walki.



Motorcycle messenger Georg Poschadel (right) of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie. He was killed in action at the end of 1943.



 $\label{thm:commander} Jochen \ Peiper \ and \ his \ regimental \ commander, \ SS-Standarten \ f \ ührer \ Theodor \ Wisch \ (left). \ In \ front \ SS-Obersturm \ f \ ührer \ Westemeyer.$ 



On 9 March 1943 Peiper was awarded the Knight's Cross.

## **Knight's Cross for SS- Sturmbannführer Peiper**

The Führer awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross to SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper, battalion commander in the SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" (SS Propaganda Company). It was the SPW-equipped battalion led by SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper which received the mission to establish contact with the Kampfgruppe of General Postel. The Kampfgruppe, mentioned in the Wehrmacht Report in the middle of February, had been fighting its way through enemy occupied territory for nine days with a number of wounded soldiers. The primary mission of Peiper's battalion, which had been reinforced with assault guns, was to bring the wounded safely through the enemy lines in a convoy of medical vehicles.

It's probably impossible to determine whether the Bolsheviks had been surprised by the sudden advance of the battalion or whether they wanted to allow the relatively small Kampfgruppe to pass through in order to be sure of its destruction when it returned. In any case, the breakthrough succeeded without appreciable resistance by the enemy. After the wounded had been picked up 30 kilometers behind the enemy lines and the battalion had established an all-round defense to guarantee the rest of Kampfgruppe Postel for the night, it escorted the return transport of the wounded the next day. In the meantime, the enemy had occupied a village which blocked the road and destroyed a bridge in no-mans-land. Sturmbannführer Peiper had the village cleared and destroyed a Bolshevik ski battalion in the process. He covered the approaches to the bridge along a wide sector. This enabled the medical column to reach friendly lines by crossing the thick ice in two places. Since this route was unsuitable for Peiper's own heavy vehicles, the battalion retraced its steps and went around the enemy in a wide-ranging march in difficult terrain.

As part of the preparations for the taking of Kharkov, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper established bridgeheads at two places on his own initiative. These were of decisive importance in passing through the following attacking forces. The tactical measures

taken during these operations were very different from one another but were amazingly appropriate for the respective enemy situation. Surprise-which is what it all boiled down to-was complete in each instance. So much so, that a large amount of booty fell into the battalion's hands.

What has been presented here in dry tones and recounted only by means of selected examples, proved itself in reality to be an operation not unlike a stage drama. But SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper was always master of the situation. The officers of the attached units often received orders that broke all the rules but which proved themselves successful and were, therefore, gladly carried out. Every officer and man of Kampfgruppe Peiper also had that feeling of unconditional confidence. Here was a man who formulated his decisions quickly and took care of all of them. He gave his orders with mathematical precision. These decisions and orders were frequently bold and unconventional, but they were issued from a sovereign mastery of the situation. Everyone was able to perceive the mental work and instinctive certainty which lay behind them.

## Das Ritterkreuz für 44-Sturmbannführer Peiper



Aufn.: F. F. Baue

Der Führer verlieh das Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes an #f-Sturmbannführer Peiper, Batalllonskommandeur in der #f-Panzergrenadier-Division "Leibstandarte-#f Adolf Hitler".

##-PK. Es war das von ##-Sturmbannführer Peiper geführ'e, mit Schützenpanzern ausgerüstete Batailton, das den Auftrag erhielt, die Verbindung zur Mitte Februar im Wehrmachtbericht erwähnten Kampfgruppe des Generals Postel aufzunehmen, die sich neun Tage lang mit vielen Verwundeten durch das vom Feind besetzte Land schlug. Auftrag des durch Sturmgeschütze verstärkten Bataillons Peiper war es vor allem, die Verwundeten in einem Geleitzug von Sanitätskraftwagen sicher durch die feindliche Hauptkamptlinie zu bringen.

Es dürfte schwer zu entscheiden sein, ob die Bolschewisten durch den plotzlichen Vorstoß des Bataillons überrascht waren oder ob sie die verhältnismäßig kleine Kampfgruppe passieren lassen wollten, um sie bei der Rückkehr um so sicherer niederzukämpfen. Der Durchbruch gelang jedenfalls ohne wesentliche Feindberührung. Nachdem die Verwundeten 30. km hinter der feindlichen Linie übernommen worden waren und nachdem das Bataillon in Igelstellung den Schutz der nächtlichen Ruhe der Kampfgruppe Postel gewährleistet hatte, übernahm es am nächsten Tage das Geleit beim Rücktransport der Verwundeten. Der Feind hatte inzwischen ein die Straße säumendes Dorf dicht besetzt und die im Niemandsland liegende Brücke vernichtet. Sturmbanführer Peiper ließ das Dorf säubern und ver-

nichtete dabei ein bolschewistisches Schnee-schuhläufer-Bataillon, schirmte die Brückenauffahrt in einem ausgedehnten Abschnitt ab und ermöglichte es dadurch der Krankenwagen-kolonne, an zwei Stellen über das noch tragfähige Eis ungehindert die eigenen Linien zu erreichen. Da dieser Weg für die eigenen schweren Fahrzeuge nicht möglich war, nahm das Bataillon den Weg zurück und umgin in einem ausgedehnten Marsch in schwierigem Gelände den Feind.

Zur Vorbereitung des Angriffs auf Charkow nahm 44-Sturmbannführer Petper an zwei

Zur Vorbereitung des Angriffs auf Charkow nahm #f-Sturmbannführer Peiper an zwei Stellen aus eigenem Entschluß Brückenköpfe in Besitz, die zur Nachführung der Angriffskräfte von entscheidender Bedeutung waren. Die taktischen Maßnahmen bei diesen Unternehmungen waren sehr verschieden und paßten sich der jeweiligen Feindlage mit einer verblüffenden Sicherheit an. Die Überraschung, auf die es allein ankam, gelang jedesmal vollkommen, so daß dem Bataillon große Beute in die Hände fiel.

Gewiß hatte der Kommandeur auch Soldatenglück. Das unbedingte Vertrauen seiner Männer aber gründete sich auf etwas anderem, auf dem Gefühl nämlich. daß hier ein geborener Führer befiehlt der von höchstem Verantwortungsbewußtsein für das Leben jedes einzelnen Mannes erfüllt ist. zugleich aber auch hart sein kann wenn es notwendig ist. Immer aber stammen Befehle und Maßnahmen nicht aus klügelnden Überlegungen, sondern aus der Mitte einer Persönlichkeit, bei der Herz Hirn und Hand eins sind So ist ihm Soldatentum nicht nur Herzenssache. nicht nur kluges Denken und nicht nur Handwerk sondern Erfüllung seines Daseins, das immer nur das des politischen Soldaten wär.

Der erst 28 Jahre alte Kommandeur, der löngere Zei+ Adjutant des Reichsführers #/ war wurde am 30. Januar 1915 zu Berlin-Wilmersdort geboren nahm am Polen- und Westfeldzug als Companiechet teil und erhielt im Mai 1940 das EK. 2. Kl. und im Juli 1940 das EK 1. Kl.

Of course, the battalion commander also had the fortunes of war smile upon him. The unconditional trust of his men, however, was based on something else, the feeling namely, that a born leader was giving orders here. A man who was filled with the highest level of regard for his responsibilities for the life of every single man and yet could be hard when the situation demanded it. Orders and directives didn't stem from hair-splitting deliberation, but rather from the center of a personality in which head, heart and hand were one. Thus for him the profession of arms wasn't just a matter of the heart, wasn't just a matter of deliberation and wasn't just a type of craftsmanship. On the contrary, it was the fulfillment of an existence which was only available to an ideological soldier.

The commander, who just turned 28 years old, was the adjutant to the Reichsführer SS for a lengthy period of time. He was born on 30 January 1915 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. He participated in the Polish and French campaigns as a company commander and received the Iron Cross, 2nd Class in May 1940 and the Iron Cross, 1st Class in June 1940.



Soldier behind the machine-gun shield of the SPW.



Personnel carrier of the Leibstandarte in front of one of the aid stations of the Panzer Regiment.



In the foreground, from left to right: SS-Untersturmführer Joachim Kaden (13. (gep.) Kompanie), SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Babick (12. (gep.) Kompanie) and SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Friedrich Breme (battalion assistant surgeon).



Peiper's SPW in the streets of Kharkov.



12 March 1943: SPW of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie push into Kharkov. In front is SS-Unterscharführer "Pieke" Bliesener's SPW with the name "Strolch" ("Vagabond") on it. Behind him is the SPW of SS-Unterscharführer Karl Kempe, which was hit shortly after this picture was taken. Kempfe was killed. The additional armor plating on the fronts of the SPW can be seen clearly.



Peiper (far left), Fritz Witt and Panzergrenadiere of the SPW Battalion.



During the street fighting in Kharkov on 12 March 1943 Peiper, SS-Standartenführer Fritz Witt (commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1) and SS-Sturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen (far right) watch the Panzergrenadiere work their way forward.



12 March 1943: On the streets of Kharkov.



Men of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 taking a short break during the street fighting in Kharkov.



An assault gun commander scans for the enemy during the fighting in Kharkov. The silhouettes of four previously knocked out tanks are indicated on the superstructure.





"Red Square" in the center of the Ukrainian capital of Kharkov. Renamed "Leibstandarte Square" after the capture of the city on 14 March 1943.

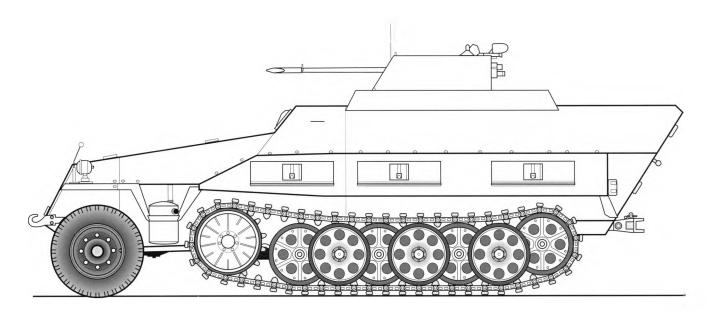
Kharkov: SS-Sturmbannführer Weidenhaupt, Peiper, and Fritz Witt.



On 18 March 1943 grenadiers of 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 used a captured Russian gun against the Soviets in their capture of Bjelgorod. From the left: Kendzia, Duffert and Kindler.



Sepp Dietrich, SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS, commander of the Leibstandarte and a fatherly figure for his soldiers. After the capture of Kharkov he was awarded the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross (16 March 1943).



Mittler Schützenpanzerwagen Ausf D (SdKfz 251/21)
Courtesy of George Bradford



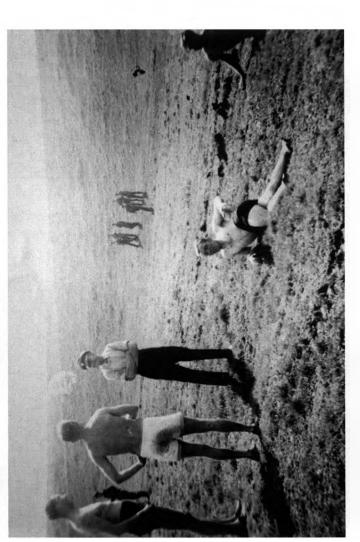
Motorcycle messenger Otto Rohmann of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie in Kharkov in March 1943.



Rudi Drecker and Anton Siegert of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie at the end of March 1943 in Kharkov. Otto Rohmann is at the rear. 165



20 April 1943: Men of the combat engineer platoon of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie after the award of their Iron Crosses. From the left: Egon Stade, unknown, Willi Pluschke, unknown, Uscha. Hans Seifert, unknown, Günther Ludwig, unknown and Sirning.



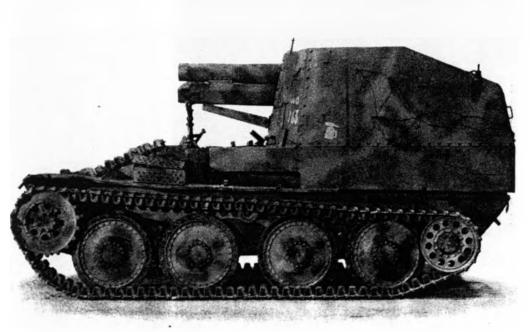
Sports in the SPW-Bataillon during the rest period at Klenewoje from the end of March to the beginning of July, 1943. Jochen Peiper (middle) with SS-Untersturmführer Bölck, SS-Haupsturmführer Guhl, and SS-Oberscharführers Gollenhorst and Maxisch (12. Kompanie).



Nikolaus Hausladen, here as SS-Junker, from Klein Beregso (Banat/Rumania). He was assigned to the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 until the summer of 1943. He died as a SS-Obersturmführer in the 86. SS-Grenadier Regiment "Schill" in the SS-Division "30 Januar" (30 January) on 18 March 1945 in the hospital at Pohlitz. He was awarded the Panzerkampfabzeichen in Bronze, the Infanteriesturmabzeichen in Silber, the Nahkampfspange in Silber and the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.



The Spieß of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Hauptscharführer Fritz Böcker (left), with two noncommissioned officers of the company.



In June 1943 Peiper activated a platoon with six Grillen. Here a Grille of the 14. (s. gep) /2SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Note the blow torch.



Taking on ammunition: Tank 527 of the 5./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1. Bertram and Kunz in the foreground.

Training on SPW in Klenowoje in June 1943.



In the meanwhile, the next operation was getting closer and closer and the men felt that the peaceful period in Klenowoje wouldn't last much longer. On 29 June 1943 the commander of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, noted in his diary:

Commander's call this morning at 1030 hours. We're moving out. The date is a secret. The organization of my company is very difficult. It is simply too large for a company. I have 49 vehicles. I could use at least 10 more. Three self-propelled antitank vehicles haven't arrived yet. A huge fighting force. At 1200 hours I left the commander's call somewhat pleased. I had every reason to be. I will lead the company in action. This operations order has put an awful lot in gear ... The Grillen are still supposed to fire tomorrow ... The commander is coming back this evening ... Jochen Thiele (author: Hauptscharführer and antitank gun platoon leader) is back from leave. He was talking about the splendid morale at home.

30 June 1943 ... The Grille firing went well ... Commander's call followed it. Orders to move out tonight. Around 1400 hours, I informed the company of the operation. Orders group with the platoon leaders. Around 1800 hours I had supper with the platoon leaders and the executive officer ... The commander called me. The march was postponed until tomorrow morning. The people we're staying with were happy that we're not moving out yet. It was very touching.<sup>23</sup>

On 30 June 1943 all regimental, separate battalion and subordinate battalion commanders received orders for the coming offensive at Sepp Dietrich's division staff headquarters. On this occasion, as usual, he didn't forget to remind his commanders to "...bring back his men alive and healthy". 24 SS-Standartenführer Theodor Wisch was to be the divisional commander in the coming operation.

On 1 July 1943 SS-Untersturmführer Otto Bölck was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class for his actions as leader of the heavy weapons platoon12. Kompanie, as was SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, platoon leader in the 13. Kompanie. The Iron Cross, 1st Class was also awarded to SS-Unterscharführer Hans Fuchs and SS-Sturmmann Herbert Rudy of the 11. Kompanie, SS-Unterscharführer Mathias Nieß of the 12. Kompanie, and SS-Unterscharführer Wilhelm Kieninger and Alfred Eberle of the 13. Kompanie. In addition, 40 Iron Crosses, 2nd Class were awarded to the men of the SPW-Bataillon.

## Operation "Citadel", the Kursk Offensive: 4 to 17 July 1943

On 1 July 1943 the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was attached to the Panzergruppe of the Leibstandarte. The commander of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie remarked:

"We moved out at 0500 hours. I had considerable combat strength, 18 SPW. The terrible rain of last night had stopped; the highway was still fairly soft. Two SPW were stuck. Otherwise I arrived in Koruscha in fairly good shape. We stayed there until evening. During the night we were to make our next jump forward".

In the morning of 2 July 1943 the SPW-Bataillon reached its new area. At noon, in a situation briefing, Peiper revealed the last details concerning the upcoming attack. The men slept in tents.

On 3 July 1943 the battalion held a quickly improvised battalion party in lovely weather. An indication of the good morale in Peiper's unit was that the men could still throw a good party immediately before a major offensive.<sup>2</sup>

## Plans and Preparations for the "Citadel" Offensive

In the spring of 1943 offensive warfare on the Eastern Front required more military forces than were available to Germany and

this forced Hitler to go over to the defensive. After the capture of Belgorod, Army Group Center could no longer maintain contact with Army Group South's left wing west of Belgorod, so that a 200 kilometer wide by 120 kilometer deep Russian salient stuck out to the west. It was the objective of Operation "Citadel" to cut off this bulge in the front lines. For this purpose, strong forces from Army Group Center were to attack to the south, and elements of Army Group South were to push north to meet them.

The II. SS-Panzer-Korps was ready to attack to the north within Army Group South's 4. Panzer-Armee. Based on defensive operation thinking, Hitler's thoughts gradually leaned toward an offensive with limited objectives to destroy large enemy forces here, in order to shorten the German lines and permit the establishment of a reserve. This would also preempt the enemy's chance to carry out a decisive offensive during 1943.

The original plan was to carry out the operation against the Kursk Salient by the middle of May at the latest. However, the start date for the attack had to be continuously postponed, because of delays in weapons deliveries and for other reasons. The Leibstandarte was part of Hausser's II. SS-Panzer-Korps in Generaloberst Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee. It had been refitted with men and equipment after the losses at Kharkov. The I. Bataillon of the Panzer-Regiment was still in Germany being organized as a Panther battalion. During the Kursk Offensive the Panzer-Regiment Leibstandarte only consisted of the three companies of the II. Bataillon along with the 13. (schwere) Tiger-Kompanie and the 14. (Pionier-) Kompanie. Additional armor consisted of the Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung, whose three batteries each had a platoon of 10.5 cm assault howitzers (Sturmhaubitzen), and the Panzerjäger-Abteilung. On 2 July 1943 the division had 11 Tigers, 72 Panzer IV's, 16 Panzer III's and II's and 31 assault guns ready for action. Some of the divisional elements had already been brought forward on 1 July 1943 while the Panzergruppe, which comprised the Panzer-Regiment, the SPW-Bataillon, the II. (gep.)/ SS-Artillerie-Regiment 1 and the 6./ Flak-Abteilung 6, reached its assembly areas on the night of 4 July 1943.

The Soviets had not been inactive during the preceding weeks. They had a very clear idea of the German objectives for the forth-coming attack and had prepared their defenses accordingly. They dug 9240 kilometers of frontline and communications trenches just in the Kursk area. Eight defensive belts and lines were arranged to a depth of 300 kilometers. Never before had any terrain been fortified with a system covered with such trenches, bunkers, field positions, antitank gun nests, entire antitank Pakfronten and observation posts. Lieutenant General Dragunski, the commander of the 1st Mechanized Brigade, wrote: "Firing positions were prepared for every tank, every gun and every machine gun; firing sectors and control points were established, initial firing instructions were prepared; and, main, reserve and decoy positions set up."<sup>3</sup>

The Soviets paid special attention to effective antitank defenses. In every red rifle company, groups equipped with Molotov cocktails, hand grenades and antitank mines were waiting for the German tanks, especially for the anticipated Tigers. Along with new antitank rifles, the 5.7 cm "wildlife killer" ("Wildtöter") antitank gun was employed. Flak, Stalin organs, and also tanks and antitank guns were dug in for exclusive antitank use, some of the tanks buried so that only the turret was above ground. There were some 1500 antitank mines in every one-kilometer sector around Kursk. The 81st Rifle Division laid 2133 antitank mines and 2126 anti-personnel mines in its sector alone. There were strong reserves of tanks and artillery. Two hundred twelve enemy tanks had been detected in the attack sector in front of the Leibstandarte on 3 July 1943. The elimination of the enemy outposts was set for 2300 hours on 4 July 1943. The divisional order read:

... The depth of the enemy's defensive zone and the narrow width of the attack sectors require an attack in depth. The penetration itself must be made rapidly and violently, immediately after preparatory bombardment by artillery and Stukas. Fire cover will be provided by the Tigers and assault guns. Artillery preparation from H+15 to H+65 (0315 to 0405 hours), with increasing fire from H+60 to H+65. Stuka attack on point 220.5 starting at H+50. Last bomb falls at H+65..."

Panzergruppe LAH (intended task organization: Panzer-Regiment without the Tiger-Kompanie and the I. Bataillon; III. (gep.)/SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2; a company from the Panzerjäger-Abteilung; II. (gep.)/Artillerie-Regiment and 6. (leichte)/Flak-Abteilung 1) is to stand by to be employed for a breakthrough east of Jakowlewo to the northeast to establish a bridgehead across the Psell, after the capture of the antitank gun strong points east of Bykowka and beyond.<sup>5</sup>

Support from the VIII. Fliegerkorps had been arranged for the attack, concentrating over the II. SS-Panzer-Korps. Concerning the predominant mood in the Leibstandarte just before the attack, the commander of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie wrote on 4 July 1943:

Orders conference this morning at 0900 hours with Obersturmbannführer Schönberger, followed by a conference with the commander (author: Peiper) ... I marked up my maps and gave the platoon leaders the company order for the attack positions and the attack. I was slowly starting to get buck fever. Would it work out as had been planned? We all had to pull together. Let the fates be with us today ... If you let your thoughts run loose on the evening before a battle, you get into some

remarkable moods. Personally, I was feeling very confident. The general enthusiasm was catching. The cannon platoon was singing soldier songs. The heavy infantry gun platoon was sighting in its machine guns. At 2100 hours we were supposed to move out ... They'd soon find out back home that we were still strong. We were all happy to be here once more. And I am pleased! <sup>6</sup>

The Russian outposts were eliminated in fierce fighting after midnight on 4 July 1943. Jochen Peiper waited impatiently for the next move. His adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, wrote a last letter to his girl friend Helga in Memel at 0215 hours while in the ready positions:

Right now, I have a final opportunity to write to you before the attack. My thoughts are always with you.

The Russian artillery is firing at us here, but it doesn't bother me much. I want to let you know what I'm thinking now about you. This isn't going to be a farewell letter, but a very loving greeting. In one hour, we'll be in action.

I know that it will be a hard and difficult battle, but we're confident. The enemy will fall! Today I have a much better understanding of the reason why we fight. I see how one of my runners holds the picture of his girl in his hand. It's not hard to figure out that many of us are thinking about our loved ones at home. But that just bonds us more tightly together. Even I am having a hard time thinking rationally and calmly. I think about and believe in Germany – and you. I want to kiss you once more, so I'll do it in my thoughts. I can't see my star, the heavens are too covered with clouds. But our thoughts will meet even so. Mine however shouldn't disturb you, for you certainly have such lovely dreams of me, and the ardor of my thoughts would frighten you. Please

## **Battalion Command Positions During the Operation at Kharkov (5 July 1943)**

#### III. (gep.)/ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2

Commander

SS-Stubaf. Jochen Peiper

Adjutant

SS-Ustuf. Werner Wolff

Orderly

SS-Ustuf. Günther Hülsen (KIA: 10 July 1943)

Signal Officer

SS-Ustuf. Hans Mahneke

Surgeon

SS-Hstuf. Dr. Robert Brüstle (WIA: 11 July 1943)

Assistant Surgeon

SS-Ostuf. Dr. Friedrich Breme

# 11. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commander

SS-Hstuf. Paul Guhl

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ustuf. Rudi Wetzel (KIA: 12 July 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Walter Kern (WIA: 7 July 1943)

SS-Hscha, Max Leike

## 12. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commander

SS-Ostuf. Georg Preuß (WIA: 11 July 1943)

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ustuf. Dieter Kohler

SS-Ustuf. Gerhard Babick

SS-Oscha. Bruno Wessels

SS-Oscha. Rudi Vieten

**Transportation Company Commander** 

SS-Ostuf. Wilhelm Ratschko (WIA: 13 July 1943)

Maintenance Company Commander

SS-Ostuf. Alfred Bloch (WIA: 13 July 1943)

Administrative Officer

SS-Hstuf. Herbert Molt (KIA: 11 July 1943)

Special-Duty Officer

SS-Ustuf. Herbert Niemeyer

#### 13. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commander

SS-Hstuf. Siegfried Wandt (WIA: 5 and 12 July 1943)

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ustuf. Kurt Thumeyer (KIA: 7 July 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Heinz Tomhardt (WIA: 13 March 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Walter Taferner

SS-Hscha. Alfred Martin

#### 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie

Company Commander

SS-Ustuf. Erhard Gührs

Infantry Gun Platoon Leader

SS-Ustuf. Otto Bölck (KIA: 15 July 1943)

SS-Oscha. RFA B. von Bergmann

Cannon Platoon and Antitank Rifle Squad Leader

SS-Hscha. Jochen Thiele

Combat Engineer Platoon leader

SS-Oscha. Wilhelm Haferstroh

forgive my poor writing. It is still very dark and I can't even read what I've written myself. I don't know when I'll next be able to hear or read anything from you. Probably not for a few weeks.

Farewell, Helga.
Yours, Wolf" 7

## Beginning of "Citadel" Offensive: 4 to 17 July 1943

The two Panzergrenadier-Regimenter of the Leibstandarte went into action on 5 July 1943 at 0405 hours. The main battlefield lying before them was organized to a depth of 25 kilometers, mined, wired, and provided with trenches and bunkers. The 2. Regiment under SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas was able to advance as far as the tank ditch in front of Hill 220.5 with the I./SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1 also getting as far. The grenadiers had to dig in because of heavy artillery fire from the west bank of the Worskla but, after the engineers had blown paths through the tank ditch, the 2. Regiment stormed Hill 220.5. With the support of Tigers and assault guns, it was able to take the hill after almost five hours of fighting.

At 1200 hours SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was able to take Hill 217.1, lying some 800 meters to the northeast. From there it gave support to SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and, by 1230 hours, it was on Hill 215.4, two and a half kilometers south of Bykowka. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, under SS-Obersturmbannführer Albert Frey, was attacking north and to the right of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. After that regiment had crossed the tank ditch it advanced as far as SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and reached Bylowka at the same time.<sup>8</sup>

Peiper waited with increasing impatience for orders for his battalion to attack. Finally, at 1430 hours, orders arrived for the Panzergruppe to break through the enemy positions to the east of Jakowlewo and establish a bridgehead on the other side of the Psell. At 1800 hours the SPW and the tanks rolled across the front line at point 234.8 and, in the twilight, ran into a Pakfront at Jakowlewo, where they were halted by order of the division. The attack was to be resumed the following day. The commander of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, described the first attack that same day:

It was already 1100 hours and a hot day. We were still in our attack positions and waiting for our moment. I had been able to camouflage my company fairly well in a small wood. I was happy about that. I had never experienced such intense Russian air force activity before. The battle had been raging since 0300 hours. We could no longer hear the sounds of the fighting. It would seem that the infantry had made good progress. The fire on our position had also died down. We had seven wounded in the battalion: Hauptsturmführer Wandt, a light head wound ... I hoped our fliers would soon establish air superiority ... The Führer had issued a call to his soldiers for this attack.

Our hour arrived at 1400 hours. The Panzergruppe pulled out. We crossed our own lines. Fighting hard, the infantry had broken open the first barriers. The Russians defended themselves with flame-throwers. An entire battalion often bogged down in front of a Pakfront. Mines were causing losses to our armored vehicles. Hauptsturmführer Kling's three Tigers penetrated the main battle line along with the company. As we followed along, the first sector was taken in the fighting. Artillery fire along our approach march had already caused us our first losses. At 1800 hours, we went on the offensive with our armored vehicles. The attack rolled across grain fields, through timber and over hills.

It was dark when we hit the second Russian line and dismounted. The armored vehicles in front were under heavy antitank gun fire and the entire field across which we were extended was under heavy artillery fire. We stopped. There were also Russian

armored vehicles in front of us. We were ordered to dig in for the night. I had the company line up behind me. Buhr was with me in the hole. The commander (author: Peiper) briefed us on the situation. It was possible the Russians would counterattack with tanks. Well, we'll see. I was back in my hole just as the first aircraft showed up. Strafing and bombing. Slowly we were getting all the old things again. It was hard to get used to it. But it was all coming back. The sky was full of flares.

Although the commander of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Wandt, was wounded in the head, he remained with his company. On 6 July 1943 SS-Panzer-Grenadier Regiment 1 attacked Hill 243.2 east of Jakowlewo and was able to take the fortified, wired and mined position by 945 hours. By 1330 hours the regiment had taken Hill 230.5 in close combat and established the basis for the Panzergruppe's attack. SS-Oberführer Wisch personally launched the Panzergruppe on an attack through Lutschki-North and Teterewino in the Psell sector. At 1315 hours and again at 1400 hours, Russian tank attacks hit SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 as well as the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. The first attack bounced off the LAH's Panzergruppe which had just gone into action. The Panzergruppe immediately destroyed eight tanks, throwing back the enemy. The commander of the Tiger-Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling, recognized the opportunity offered and

... pushed immediately after the enemy and, in reckless exposure of his person at the lead of the Panzergruppe, captured the heights west of Prochorowka. With this move, our lead elements had thrust some 60 to 70 kilometers deep into enemy territory. In these two days, his company destroyed 50 T-34's, 1 KW 1, one KW 2 and 43 antitank guns of medium and heavy caliber. 10

The SPW-Bataillon reached the heights two kilometers southwest of Teterewino and advanced toward the highlands lying to its north. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, commander of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, wrote:

I woke up at 0330 hours. My blanket was wet. It had rained for two hours. It slowly grew light. Our 360-degree defensive position was heavily reinforced during the night: antitank gun and flak elements, the Aufklärungs-Abteilung, and infantry had caught up with us. At 0500 hours Russian artillery and tanks began to fire on our assembly area. Finally Stukas arrived which helped us. We were located in front of a heavily fortified hill position. The infantry attacked during the middle of the day. They made it. Hats off to the infantry! Artillery and tank fire has caused us losses. Schellhorn was killed. Good, old Mewes was also wounded. All together there were six wounded. It was a pity, and we hadn't even launched a regular attack yet.

In the afternoon the Russians tried to snatch victory from our grasp. A tank brigade hit us in the flank. Our SPW joined the tank battle. The Leibstandarte's first armor battle. I watched it from the hill. It was a savage thing. We swung the battalion around the hill and got ready for a new attack to the northeast. Elements of the Panzer-Abteilung and the Aufklärungs-Abteilung had already assembled for the attack in front of us. Then we headed north, hell-bent for leather. We were being flanked from both the left and right. Would we reach the Psell? Keep on moving, keep on moving. We were moving on a broad front behind the Aufklärungs-Abteilung and the tanks. Then suddenly, it seemed to be over. Mines strewn across the road and across the open ground. Antitank guns and tanks behind a tank ditch on the hill. Four armored vehicles hit mines. The Luftwaffe liaison had also been blown up in his SPW. No, we wouldn't take the hill this time. It was already too dark as well. In any case, Teterewino was in our hands. But could we stay there? We had to be seriously flanked already. We took cover.

I spent the nights at the battalion command post. At 2400 hours I laid down to sleep. At 0130 hours, a call came in from the 12. Kompanie, (Ostuf.) Preuß had six Russian tanks in front of him. There were even more at the 13. Kompanie. Did the Russians want to push us out? Remarkable, hardly anyone was excited. We defended ourselves. The fighting went on into the morning. The Russians were squashed. Five of their sixteen T-34's had been knocked out. Six Russians deserted to us. They told us that they belonged to a tank corps that had only entrained in Moscow on 5 July. The last reserves? ...

During the night something crazy happened. Three Russian tanks with mounted infantry drove right through our village. A neat Hussar trick. One of Hauptsturmführer Kling's Tigers was covering the road during the night. He destroyed the three tanks at ten meters range.<sup>11</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Thumeyer of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie was severely wounded at Tomarowka. The Leibstandarte was in position along the line north Teterewino (SPW-Bataillon) – Lutschki north – Pokrowka east – two kilometers west of Uljanoff. On 7 July 1943 SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 finished taking Pokrowka and Jakowlewo and was finally able to get the upper hand in fierce defensive fighting against Soviet tanks coming from Obojan It was effectively supported by Stuka and ground-support aircraft. The enemy also launched several armored attacks on Lutschki, which were repelled.

At 0600 hours, after Stuka attacks, Peiper's SPW-Bataillon moved out with the Panzergruppen of both the Leibstandarte and "Das Reich" on the Teterewino Rollbahn toward Prochorowka. At 0710 hours Soviet tanks attacked from the north and the northeast. The tank battle lasted until 1200, then the enemy pulled back to the north. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs:

The day went fairly quietly. It's not possible to describe everything that happened. We shot down a scout plane. We saw at least ten aircraft shot down during the day. It was all becoming routine. The Russians had cut us off. That didn't upset anyone anymore. We felt far superior to the Russians. On the hill to our right, Sturmbannführer Tychsen of the "Reich" Division (author: commander, II./SS-Panzer-Regiment "Das Reich") gave battle and destroyed 35 tanks ...

I was able to wash myself again today for the first time in five days. I briefed the situation to the squad leaders. We were going to stay there today. I had the company take cover in a nearby orchard. It was terribly hot. The 11. Kompanie had 11 casualties from a bombing attack. At 1600 hours, a scout plane reported that 35 enemy tanks were ready to attack from behind the hill. We had just gotten together with the commander (author: Peiper) and Sturmbannführer Groß. Groß immediately attacked with his tanks. He destroyed 16 tanks against no losses of our own. At 2200 hours commander's call. Early in the morning we were to attack again to the west. There were large enemy tank units along our flanks which we were to eliminate. 12

SS-Rottenführer Rolf Ehrhardt of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 reported the fighting from the point of view of a tank crew:

An infantry runner reported that Sturmbannführer Peiper had been wounded in the middle of the Russians and was asking to be pulled out. Everyone who heard it knew that something had to happen. The wall of smoke and fire created a barrier for both friend and foe. We watched every movement. An attacking T-34 wouldn't move 50 meters without becoming a sieve. How deep was this smoke zone? Would it be possible to use it for concealment to get through to Peiper's command post? All these questions went through our heads. How did our commander, Hauptsturmführer Tiemann, feel? He now had to decide who to

send in to pull Peiper out. Then radio traffic: "Irene, this is Walter". That's us. "You're in the best position. Take the runner in the command vehicle and try to free Peiper. Drive like a sonuvabitch. It's your only chance!" The word "sonuvabitch" told me what the situation was like. This Landser word wasn't in our commander's vocabulary, and it showed me that he too was extremely agitated.

Untersturmführer Weiser confirmed the message and gave the appropriate orders to our platoon's tanks. He took the runner on board. "Driver, move out!" was his order to me. After a few moments, I was enveloped in smoke, and I had to go more slowly so as not to run into something. The view through my port was like a silent film: wreckage, flames, ghostly figures with Russian helmets. Hit after hit. Suddenly a blow somewhere. Change directions? How could anyone find a command post in this chaos? The runner had no chance to orient himself, since he was sitting in a closed turret.

Weiser radioed several times, requested stronger fire support, ordered the rest of the vehicles to stay back, reported hits, and reported that he was going on alone with the command vehicle. Then the last radio contact: "Taking hits from antitank rifles and light antitank gun – orientation impossible – continuing to move forward". During this confusion, none of us noticed that we had stopped receiving any confirmation or orders. When had the antenna given up the ghost? We had lost all contact with the outside – no orders – and unable to break off this hopeless operation. All of this probably took less time than it takes to read about it.

The intercom was still intact. We were still moving toward the enemy amidst enemy forces. Was that a German SPW, a German helmet? Keep moving! They're still Russians! Suddenly, the excited order:

"T-34 – 2 o'clock – antitank round – open fire!" "The turret is jammed," reported the gunner. Now things were really getting serious.

"Driver, turn the vehicle right, pull it to the right!" came the order. I turned, driving in 3rd gear; had to shift, but I knew that I didn't have any time. Pulled the vehicle around. Suddenly a crack, then quiet! A look at the RPM indicator was enough. The engine had quit. Hit or stalled? Start it up! The engine ran.

I asked, "What should I do?"

The radioman tore off my headphones and yelled at me: "The gunner is dead, and so is the intercom."

I yelled back, "Have the loader pass it on. What am I supposed to do!" Answer, "The commander is dead, too."

"Driver, now it's up to you," ran through my head. In the seconds since we had been hit on the gunner's side, I could see Russians attacking the vehicle. I drove on, and suddenly I saw our enemy, a T-34 at no more than 100 meters. Would the cannon still move? I swung the wagon 90° around, and there was an explosion. I was faster by a few seconds. With a sixth sense, I managed to get a wreck between us. Once more a 90° turn, that felt like it had to be the way back. The runner dismounted in the middle of the Russians, the loader was wounded. I wasn't safe yet. I got back out of the smoke, and I saw the section leader Unterscharführer Harald Stein with his vehicle. My armored glass block had been shot to pieces. I kept going with my head out of the hatch and Stein gave me directions by hand signal.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper got out of his predicament unwounded. The 22-year-old SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Thumeyer from Landeshut of the 13. (armored) Kompanie died at noon in Tomarowka from wounds suffered on the previous day. SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern was wounded. The LSSAH was in a line running north Lutschki – Jablotschki – Bol. Majatschki – Pokrowka. 75 enemy tanks, 23 guns, and 12 aircraft

had been destroyed. During the three days of operation "Citadel" so far, 123 tanks, 37 guns, and 12 aircraft had been knocked out.<sup>15</sup>

The flanks of the II. SS-Panzer-Korps were endangered by massive Russian tank attacks. So the 4. Panzer-Armee decided to launch an attack with all forces against the enemy on the north front. At 0800 hours on 8 July 1943 the Leibstandarte's Panzergruppe moved out toward the northwest. At 0920 hours it ran into at least 40 enemy tanks at Wesselyj. The armor battle lasted an hour. After regrouping, the Panzergruppe attacked further to the west at 1100 hours and at 1205 hours was fighting for Wesselyj. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs took part in this fighting with the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie:

Assembly and attack. But it was noon before things started. War correspondent King was with me. We were moving as the second wave behind the tanks. The first village was taken. It got tough again outside Rylskij and Wesselyj – dug-in tanks, antitank guns, infantry, etc. It was a mess. I'll try to describe the situation. We couldn't go forward. The Russians were on the left again. The right was our former attack axis.

They were also there as well. Thirty-five Russian tanks just broke into the village that we left five kilometers behind us. Poor infantry. The Peiper Bataillon was located behind the tanks behind the ridge. What were we going to do? Bring our choir together and sing, "Friends, we have seen the world ..." . I'll write it down once more. It looked like a really pleasant afternoon was developing. The situation behind us cleared itself up on its own. Two Tigers had stayed back in Teterewino with damaged tracks. They destroyed all of the tanks which broke in. That's easy to write, but it was an incredible thing to do.

Peiper took over command of the Panzergruppe and immediately ordered a combined attack on Rylskij by the tanks and Panzergrenadiere. Now we had the chance to show the tanks how Panzergrenadiers attacked. We raced directly from our line of march into the attack at incredible speed and in front of the tanks. Peiper's voice in the microphone: "Move, Gührs, move! Wandt! (author: commander, 13. Kompanie) Move, move fast!"

And so on we went. It was a wild chase. I drove my men to top speed. This was how it went, our strength lay in speed. We had to take full advantage of it. The company attacked magnificently. The antitank rifles were now right behind me.

The commander of the 13. Kompanie was on my left. Another 800 meters to the village. The enemy fire was increasing steadily. There were explosions to the right and left, in front and behind. I had the headphones on and was giving orders over the microphone. Because of that, I couldn't hear anything. A smoke screen was put down on our left. The clouds moved toward us. We were no more than 500 meters away. We had to make it. Then I saw two Russian tanks moving out of the smoke toward us, firing wildly. I also laid smoke and ordered us to pull back. There was a small depression 300 meters back which would provide some cover. The Obersturmführer with the mortars took a direct hit on his vehicle. They were all dead. I had us move forward and try to outflank them on the right. The 11. (author: Kompanie, under Hauptsturmführer Guhl) was outflanking them on the left.

Our tanks were still far to the rear. They couldn't keep up with us. My Grillen self-propelled guns moved off to the firing line and I stormed over the hill. I made it. Suddenly, I saw 17 tanks across from me at 1500 meters. A tank fired, but didn't hit anything. I positioned my artillery. Six guns are a fearful thing. When it got dark I broke off the fight and tried to make radio contact with the commander. I turned to my left, but I couldn't pick up any radio traffic. Finally Preuß (author: Obersturmführer, commander 12. Kompanie) reported in. I had him identify his position with star shells.

There were 80 tanks in this nest, according to the prisoners, and they were cut down by us few grenadiers. One Tiger, which had pushed forward to the outskirts of the village during the course of the fighting, destroyed 14 of them. By God, it was hot when I reported to the commander. It was raining, and it was 2000 hours. We were all pleased with our success. At 2100 hours we pulled back. I led. We were in north Lutschki during the night. 16

In the fighting against the above-mentioned tank-reinforced Pakfront, the Tiger-Kompanie distinguished itself once again. SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling and four tanks fought their way from the flank into the position and destroyed several dug-in tanks. He used elements of the SPW-Bataillon to hit the enemy from behind, which caused him to fall back. The Tigers destroyed 45 enemy tanks that day.<sup>17</sup> SS-Obersturmführer Hugo Kraas described the 11. (gep.) Kompanie in action under SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl:

On 8 July 1943 the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 – attached to the division's Panzergruppe – was told to destroy an enemy battle group of some 40 to 50 tanks which had been detected in the Wesselyj - Ssuch - Ssolotine area by reconnaissance. The Panzergruppe's attack began at 1200 hours but was stopped by the extraordinarily strong enemy defensive lines at Rylskij, and remained bogged down for the time being. A new attack was ordered for 1800 hours by the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, reinforced by the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Before the start of the attack, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl was given the mission to use elements of his company to establish contact with the SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung which was attacking further to the north. The elements of the Panzergruppe attacking at 1800 hours ran into extremely heavy defensive fire, which brought the attack to a halt on the heights 1.5 km south east of Rylskij. At the same time the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was blinded by its own smoke, so that this battalion's attack wasn't advancing smoothly either.

Rapidly assessing the situation and on his own initiative, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, who had just arrived back at the battalion from his liaison mission, took four SPW and moved around behind the enemy forward elements from the left. He created the utmost confusion in the enemy ranks by this surprise attack. Deceived by the noise, firepower and cloud of dust, the enemy tank forces withdrew. In a bold pursuit SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl and three SPW exploited this panic and seized the river south of Rylskij. The river was an obstacle for armor. The enemy withdrawal became a rout. In some cases, the enemy tank crews left their operational vehicles and waded across the river.

As a result of this action SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl was able to capture 31 enemy tanks and destroy them with demolition charges. In addition, the enemy lost about 200 dead as well as numerous light infantry weapons. Initially, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl's light forces held back the enemy forces launching a counterattack with tank support. Not until the renewed attack of enemy tanks posed an immediate threat to SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl's weak force and the elements of the Panzergruppe fighting further to the south were unable to relieve him did SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl pull back into a small depression, defending on all sides. When darkness fell he still had no possibility of pulling back. SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl blew up his remaining operational SPW and fought his way back to his battalion with his men on a foot march which lasted half a day. 18

Altogether, the Leibstandarte destroyed 82 tanks. As supplies for the Panzergruppe were constantly interrupted by enemy tanks, the division was ordered to pull back to the divisional security zone. On 9 July 1943 the Panzergruppe was to stay behind the main battle line. The SPW-Bataillon was able to rest in Lutschki

that day. 19 SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 reached Rylskij without having to fight. The commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, wrote:

... The enemy knew what was facing him and he bet everything on one card. He was throwing his forces against us with hellish stubbornness. A tank battle of considerable size had developed. It seemed as if each new phase of the fighting escalated in intensity. By making a concerted effort with concentrated forces, we were really accomplishing the impossible! <sup>20</sup>

At 1045 hours on 10 July 1943 the Leibstandarte, including SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, attacked. The men of the SPW-Bataillon remained in their ready positions in Teterewino on their SPW. They were to move north after the breakthrough succeeded. The objective was the eastern outskirts of Prochorowka. The attack gained ground after hard fighting, in which the I. and II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 were severely impeded by Russian artillery fire from the heights north of the Psell. The I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was fighting at the north edge of the Distr. Slojewoje Woods and the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, with Tiger and Sturmgeschütz support, was able to take Hill 241.6, which the Russians had reinforced with entrenched tanks.

Peiper's orderly officer, SS-Untersturmführer Günther Hülsen, was killed. At his own request, SS-Hauptsturmführer Herbert Molt, the administrative officer, replaced him as orderly officer. Peiper's adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, destroyed a T-34 in close combat. The assistant platoon leader of the Grille platoon of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, SS-Oberscharführer and officer candidate Bernd von Bergmann, was wounded. Grille gun commander, SS-Unterscharführer Bachmann, was killed in action. The six Grillen had proven their worth in this, their first time in battle. They rode into action as part of the SPW-Bataillon immediately behind the SPW and were able to eliminate many Russian field positions, antitank guns, and bunkers with their 15 cm shells. It had originally been intended that the Grille platoon's fire control would be located in the platoon leader's SPW. However, the platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Otto Bölck, went into action in a Grille. 21 The Grille gun commanders came from the heavy machine gun platoon of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie and were masters of indirect fire. The Grille platoon was not provided with range finders which were available for the heavy machine guns, mortars and other weapons systems.

Grille gunner, SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler, remembered: "We fired according to estimates by thumb, forefinger and other processes for estimating range. And this meant that our aim wasn't too precise, unless of course, one was good at estimating ranges. Those who were bad at estimating ranges missed a lot of targets". Along with the normal ammunition, the Grillen could also fire 30 cm "stick" shells, which had to be loaded into the muzzle.

SS-Rottenführer Adam Rensch commented on his experiences that day:

It was about 1300 hours when the 8./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 took up positions on the eastern outskirts of the village of Lutschki. The 1. Zug had to cover the right. Looking from east to west, the road ran directly behind us in a curve to the right. The antitank gun was alongside a house, pointed to the west, toward the road. Right after we had taken up positions the regimental commander, Hugo Kraas, suddenly appeared among us in his shirt sleeves, rifle in hand. He spoke to us and warned us to be particularly careful, as the Russians could come from anywhere. The battalion command post was east of the road, about 100 m away. Suddenly we heard tank noises from that direction. The first tank came from the east and destroyed an empty ambu-

lance and drove past us in a cloud of dust into the right-hand curve. The second tank followed immediately behind it, more slowly because of the dust. The antitank gun crew was swinging the gun toward the tank. Rudi Nadler recognized the danger for the gun crew, grabbed a hollow charge demolition charge and ran up to the tank from the side. He placed the charge on the tank, which immediately began to burn. Evidently, the approaching third tank was perplexed by the sight of the burning tank. It came to a stop behind the burning second tank. Rudi made good use of the tank crew's shocked indecision and destroyed that tank as well with another hollow charge. The first tank was destroyed by the antitank gun at the end of the village.<sup>23</sup>

During the Kursk Offensive individual grenadiers, such as SS-Sturmmann Rudi Nadler of the antitank gun platoon of the 10. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, often engaged tanks in one-on-one duels. By evening, the 2. Regiment was located at the bend of the railroad past the line Bar – north slope of Hill 241.6.

On 11 July 1943 the I. and II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 launched another attack at Prochorowka on bad roads. Artillery fire coming from their left flank slowed up the advance, as did the enemy tank attack on the right. The 2. Regiment encountered an antitank ditch southwest of Swch. Oktjabrski. Starting at 0630 hours the 1. Regiment attacked via north Lutschki through the woods north of Storoshewoje, in order to beat back the flanking efforts from there and from Jamki. At 0905 hours after a Stuka bombardment SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and the Aufklärungs-Abteilung attacked, and the II./ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 - supported by Tigers and assault guns was able to take the northern part of Hill 252.2 in close combat. Part of the antitank ditch was captured by SS-Hauptsturmführer Becker's I. Bataillon and the combat engineers built crossings. The gun commander of a Wespe (wasp), SS-Unterscharführer Hellmuth Franke, was there:

Since everyone was bunched up at the few crossing points of the antitank ditch, which the engineers were still building, there was tremendous confusion. Even radio communication was partly interrupted because of this concentration in a very narrow area, so that at first every gun commander had to act on his own initiative. The Soviet artillery took full advantage of this and the T-34's launched a counterattack. Everywhere you looked, tanks, tanks and more tanks, and we were right in the middle with our tiny Wespe. The engine noise, the firing of the tank cannon mixed with the occasional rattle of machine guns and submachine guns - a helluva noise with continuously varying background. It was hard for a trained artillery man to keep track of what was going on in such short-range tank fighting. I shouted "Move out smartly" into the driver's microphone, just to get away from that damned ditch. After about 100 meters, "Halt!" The Wespe stopped, and a T-34 rolled right past in front of us scarcely 30 meters away. My gunner already had him in his sights. "Fire!" and there was one more wrecked tank on the battlefield. A deafening explosion cut off our cheers. Hit on the muzzle of our gun. Cannoneer dead. Loader wounded. The gunner and I were knocked out of the open top of the Wespe by the concussion. 24

At 1015 hours Peiper, along with the rest of the Panzergruppe, received orders to go into action. The Panzergruppe crossed the antitank ditch at 1230 hours and attacked the southern portion of Hill 252.2. After hard fighting, the Panzergruppe was able to report that it had taken Hill 252.2 just south of Swch. Oktjabrski at 1310 hours. SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler, the gunner in SS-Rottenführer Kendzia's Grille in the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, destroyed a Soviet tank at Hill 252.2. The company runner, Schwanke was wounded.<sup>25</sup> Peiper's entire battalion was in

close combat at Hill 252.2.26 In spite of the Stuka liaison officer riding in Peiper's SPW, during the Stuka attack on Swch. Oktjabrski a bomb hit one of the friendly SPW, which was destroyed along with its crew. Three operational Tigers supported the attack on the hill west of Prochorowka by destroying 28 antitank guns and six howitzers.<sup>27</sup> Because of its open flanks, the Panzergruppe came to a halt in front of the enemy at 1450 hours. The Leibstandarte stood there with open flanks, the two neighboring divisions hadn't kept up with it. It was positioned along the line Storoshewoje – west and east edge of the woods north of Storoshewoje – northwest of 252.2 – high ground west of Swch. Oktjabski – east edge of Hill 252.2. SS-Sturmmann Erich Schöbel of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie reported:

On 11 July 1943 there was heavy rain toward noon. We attacked and soon bogged down as the enemy was too strong. Mines had been laid but were removed by the engineers. Then our SPW under Unterscharführer Willi Bott took a hit from an antitank rifle through the hatch. Bott was killed, his lungs torn to pieces. We bailed out. I – the assistant driver and radioman – received a surface wound across the chest, which caused me to lose a lot of blood. I reported it to commander Guhl. He radioed back: "If Schöbel can still drive, take the SPW back to the rear with Unterscharführer Bott and the wounded!" I did as I was ordered and then went to the main aid station.<sup>28</sup>

SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl was wounded by a shell splinter on the right thigh. After he had the splinter removed by Dr. Breme at the SPW-Bataillon's forward aid station and the wound cauterized, he was back at the company on the following morning. The commander of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, was wounded and had to go back to the corps hospital at Kharkov. The battalion surgeon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Brüstle, was also wounded, but remained with the unit. The administrative officer and acting orderly officer, SS-Hauptsturmführer Herbert Molt, was killed at Komsomolez while riding in a motorcycle sidecar.

On the evening of this 11 July 1943 Dr. Herbert Schramm made the following notes on his days of fighting which Peiper's men had experienced:

Seven days of attack. Seven days of hard fighting for every field position, for every fox hole, for every antitank ditch, for the entire layered defensive system which the Soviets had placed around the threatened iron fist of Kursk. Seven days of burning heat and explosive cloud bursts, full of howling, whistling, and crashing iron, continuously torn by the endless, diving waves of Stukas and the whistling flight of the fighters, and punctuated by the evil growl and rattle of tank engines and tracks, hammered by the rattle of machine gun fire and by antiaircraft fire of all calibers, interrupted by the roar of orders and by the groans and screams of the wounded and dying.

Seven nights of mild summer or streaming rain, torn into flames by firefights with the Soviets and the bombing attacks by the "sewing machines" which persistently comb through the woods filled with our trains and reserves. During these seven days and nights, there have been minutes which have stretched into hours, but for us, it's as if the attack had just begun yesterday. The assault on the "Red Hill", the fight for the second antitank ditch, the advance along the Rollbahn, the close combat with the T-34, the large antitank ditch in the Rutschny Woods, and then the four hours yesterday afternoon, when our SPW was under heavy shell fire and the SPW next to us received no orders to fire – all these experiences flow together in our memory, as if they weren't distributed among seven days, but had all been experienced on one. But the notes on my calendar, the names of places and fights, commanders, officers and men bring some organization to the course of events.

It was now the evening of 11 July. The SPW of the armored battalion were positioned at regular intervals among the Soviet field positions captured today, and the men were happy they didn't have to dig in today and can spend the night in the Russian trenches and bunkers. But none of them were really happy. Especially the commander, who was climbing about wearily among the trenches and foxholes. The day was a disappointment to him. Right now, after the system of fortifications had been broken and open ground lay in front of us, this should have been his moment, the time for a rousing pursuit after the enemy and through the enemy. And now, halt from the brass! The hours under artillery fire, the escorting armor ordered to hold their fire and not allowed to shoot at known targets.

"Mark time!" they said. "You're too far forward, wait for the neighboring divisions!"

We had been happy to be with Peiper's battalion as it launched its famous attack and we understand his disappointment, the disappointment of his battalion. For it was really, entirely his battalion, proud of its special status and proud of the missions it was given. But this war in the east wasn't something that offered officers and men little chance to distinguish themselves. Who knows what tomorrow will bring.

Meanwhile, the Panzergrenadiere had to clean up the trenches. Here and there they pulled out yet another Bolshevik who was only too happy to stay behind and now, grinning in an embarrassed manner, raised his hands. In one trench they found a dead commissar, who we lay on the berm so we didn't have to keep stepping over him. The red enamel of the Order of Lenin shined between the blood stains on his blouse.

Captured submachine guns and automatic weapons were thrown into a pile. We have one of the long Russian antitank rifles for every personnel carrier. Our fine field kitchen came up in the dark and after the wetness of a storm a spoonful of warm soup did us a lot of good. The sentries were posted. We were going to sleep with the company headquarters personnel in a small, primitive shelter, but it was still too early. The earth had drunk in the rain of the day and the profusely growing wild plants of the fallow lands were giving off scents of thyme, peppermint, and chamomile. Greedily our lungs drink it in. For days they had had to suck in foul-smelling fumes and smoke. The battle slowly quieted down and we lay down to sleep – the pistol to the left, the submachine gun to the right, and the helmet as a pillow. A stray bug, which had found shelter on my wrist, tried in vain to disturb my heavy sleep, through which drifted dreams of the day's events.<sup>29</sup>

On 12 July 1943 after eliminating the flank threat on the Psell, the Panzergruppe, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and the Aufklärungs-Abteilung were to take Prochorowka and Hill 252.4 together with the "Totenkopf" Division. The twelfth of July 1943 will go down in military history as the day of the tank battle at Prochorowka. It was the greatest tank battle in history. Early in the morning of 12 July 1943 150 Soviet tanks pushed through the German main battle line and, at high speed, encountered SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 at Swch. Stalinsk and Peiper's battalion on Hill 252.2 south of Prochorowka. SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, the commander of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, wrote:

We had taken a hill (author: Hill 252.2.) during the night and thrown the Russians out of their positions. We took over their trenches and foxholes. Sentries were posted. They attacked in the morning at 0700 hour. 148 Russian tanks approached in our sector along a 1 kilometer wide front. Most of us were asleep when suddenly they were upon us with aircraft, and a vast number of tanks with mounted infantry. It was hell. They were around us, on top of us, and among us. We fought man-to-man.

We jumped out of our holes, grabbed the hollow charges from

our SPW to use against the tanks, jumped onto our SPW and took on every enemy in sight. It was hell! This battle lasted only two hours. At 0900 hours the battlefield was firmly back in our hands.

My company had destroyed 15 Russian tanks.30

SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler, the gunner in a Grille, destroyed a Soviet tank. His comrades of the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie, SS-Rottenführer Erich Jost and the 20-year-old native of Berlin, SS-Rottenführer Günther Vogel of the antitank rifle group, each destroyed an enemy tank in close combat, for which they were decorated with the Iron Cross, 1st Class.<sup>31</sup>

Affected by this difficult experience, it wasn't until 21 July 1943 that SS-Untersturmführer Gührs resumed his descriptions, which vividly mirrored the young officer's inner feelings:

I hadn't written anything further in my diary, as I believed that I might have to destroy it. I couldn't deal with it. It was too much for me. The mental pressure often threatened to tear me apart. Now I have a little distance from it and I can write and talk about it once more. I find even that remarkable. A man can take an awful lot ... The unforgettable twelfth of July. The Russians approached our sector with 148 tanks and a division of armored infantry. The attack began at 0700 hours, and by 0900 hours we were once again masters of the battlefield. But it was hell ... Not one Russian tank got away. 148 tanks lay destroyed on the battlefield. We were more than a match for them ... It was an expensively bought victory. I found little Polanski dead in a trench. Untersturmführer Bölck was severely wounded. I don't want to list them all here.<sup>32</sup>

SS-Rottenführer Johannes Bräuer, driver for SS-Unterscharführer Fröbel's mortar SPW in the 11. (gep.) Kompanie recounted:

On 11 July 1943 after we had crossed an antitank ditch, we moved into an assembly area after nightfall. It was only in the light of dawn on 12 July 1943 that we could actually see what all had assembled there. It was hard to imagine the enormity of what was going on. In any case, the enlisted personnel hadn't a clue as to what they were going to face shortly. Since the beginning of the Russian war, I had been everywhere from Shitomir to Rostow, but I had never yet experienced such hectic activity and an inferno like this. Everything happened in such a short time, that we really didn't know what to do.<sup>33</sup>

In an instant we were hemmed in by T-34's which were firing wildly in all directions, some even ramming each other, as so many tanks were exploding and in flames. Although we had hollow charges, we had no Panzerfäuste, and new T-34's kept coming over the ridge, racing down the slope and turning over in the antitank ditch, behind which we were assembled.

It must have been around 0900 hours in the morning when I was hit by shrapnel in the left eye and lung and bandaged by Hauptsturmführer Brüstle. I could no longer see and how I got out of that hell is still a mystery to me today.<sup>34</sup>

SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper was just as surprised by the massed tank penetration as were his grenadiers. In the midst of the deafening roar of the high-explosive and antitank round explosions, the inferno of exploding tanks, burning SPW and the shouting Germans and Soviets, the commander, Peiper, showed his battalion by personal example how to fight. He was just as much a Panzergrenadier as his men. When a Russian tank rattled by close to him, Peiper ran crouching to the T-34, waited for a favorable moment, then climbed onto the turret, tore open the turret hatch, and threw a bundle of hand grenades inside. He quickly jumped off the T-34, which was shaken by a dull explosion immediately afterwards.<sup>35</sup> His adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, lay in position with a machine gun in the very front line, firing at the attacking Red Army men. He took over the

leaderless 13. Kompanie, whose commander Wandt was wounded, and with this company held out against the on-rushing Soviet tanks with such steadiness that he was recommended for the Knight's Cross for this action by Jochen Peiper.

SS-Untersturmführer Wolff has participated in two eastern campaigns and was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class in March 1943. Wolff is the very best example of a young front-line officer who has constantly distinguished himself by his extraordinary bravery and outstanding successes. As a born leader, he has always shown exemplary tactical decisiveness and played an outstanding part with his platoon during the winter battle for Kharkov and at the capture of Belgorod. Using the 3.7 cm antitank gun on his SPW, he personally destroyed 11 guns, as well as numerous mortars, machine guns and antitank rifles. Moreover, in a display of bold daring, he managed to destroy two tanks of the T-34 model at extremely close range with his small-caliber cannon.

When the Russians broke through our security line on Hill 252.2 south of Prochorowka with some 150 tanks and mounted and dismounted infantry on 12 July 1943, this was the moment of Wolff's greatest distinction. They were firing from every gun and appeared completely by surprise between the SPW of the battalion which was positioned in reserve on the reverse slope. The Panzergrenadiere were in trenches and foxholes. With incredible élan, and on his own initiative, he took command of a company left leaderless by a casualty, organized an immediate defense front, sent out tank destroyer teams and, while fearlessly exposing his own person, saved weapons and ammunition from the burning and exploding SPW, which created the prerequisite for us to hold out. Thanks to his aggressiveness he was able to destroy a T-34 tank in close combat and, in a man-to-man struggle, killed the commanding general with the general's own dagger. When by the evening of this hot day an entire enemy tank corps had been thoroughly destroyed and we had taken back our old lines in a counterattack, these successes are closely linked to the person of SS-Untersturmführer Wolff. By his willingness to take responsibility, he was a shining example and displayed leadership which was rock steady in any crisis.36

SS-Obersturmbannführer Albert Frey, commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, wrote: "I saw individual SPW drivers attempting to ram the heavily armored Russian tanks from the side with their much lighter SPW ... To me this was an expression of the unshakable will to win and to survive possessed by our men".<sup>37</sup>

SS-Unterscharführer Erhart Knöfel of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie reported:

Our SPW moved out in the gray light of dawn. Russian tanks immediately ran into ours on the hill. Some of ours came back; in the middle of them were Russian tanks with mounted infantry. A T-34 steered toward us and rammed us. The hollow charge weapons we had at the time were put to use, but some didn't work in this tumult. Untersturmführer Wolff used them to crack open his tanks. He lay shoulder to shoulder with us.

Then there was trouble with the mounted Russian infantry. In the meantime, our Grillen and the self-propelled guns began their "harvest" in open-sight firing from the antitank ditch. The Russian attack bogged down. Now all hell broke loose. Jets of flame and tank cupolas flying through the air. Of course we had losses too. While kneeling to bandage a wounded man, I was shot through the thigh. Web pistol belt off — an emergency bandage — and I looked for cover. I found a hole close by and when I went to jump in, what did I see? Two fear-filled eyes staring at me: men from the crew of a destroyed Russian tank, also weaponless.<sup>38</sup>

About 200 meters from the SPW-Bataillon, to the right of the embankment, a Soviet tank was put out of action in which there

was said to be a Russian general who surrendered.<sup>39</sup> The leader of the Grille platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Otto Bölck, was severely wounded by a piece of shrapnel the size of a fist which hit him under the collar bone. He died three days later in Kharkov. The commander of the last SPW with a 7.5 cm gun, SS-Unterscharführer Hannes Duffert of the 14. Kompanie, was killed, as was SS-Untersturmführer Rudi Wetzel of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, along with many others.

SS-Sturmmann Heinz Glenewinkel of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie noted in his diary: "Major armor battle, we lost 20 – 17 of them total losses – against 72 Russian tanks. Four T-40's captured by the company. I got to ride in a T-70 myself." 40

#### Jochen Peiper wrote:

On 12 July 1943 the Russians rolled over our infantry on Hill 252.2 just south of Prochorowka with about 150 tanks and, firing from every gun, they suddenly appeared in the middle of our battalion which was in reserve on the reverse slope of the hill. Ignoring the incredibly heavy tank and infantry fire, Guhl jumped from hole to hole, organized the defense, sent out close quarters fighters, and fetched ammunition and weapons from the burning and exploding SPW ... Wounded himself, lying between two exploding armored vehicles with no possibility of rapid help, Guhl was a shining example of devotion to duty and stability in a crisis situation. A little later, he launched a counterattack on his own initiative with hastily assembled troop elements and took back our old lines.<sup>41</sup>

SS-Sturmmann Rudi Nadler of the 10. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 destroyed a T-34 in close combat, his third since the start of "Citadel". Even the company medic of the 7./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 destroyed a Soviet tank in close combat. The first sergeant of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Hauptscharführer Adolf Sellmeier, was one of the many men in the SPW-Bataillon who had destroyed Soviet tanks. When he was surprised by enemy tanks while bringing rations up to the lines, he was able to destroy two T-34's with hollow charges. War reporter Dr. Hermann Schramm witnessed the major fighting that day while with the SPW-Bataillon and in Peiper's immediate vicinity:

While we were still drowsy with sleep that morning, exploding shells from heavy artillery fire began to rain down which would soon be hitting our positions. But we still weren't awake enough to distinguish between dream and reality ... then sleep was whisked away, and we got ready. The Silesian, a Rottenführer, wanted to go back to the SPW to get more grenades and hollow charges but the company commander called him back: "They're coming!" We heard them droning toward us through the shell bursts which danced around the tanks; then several T-34's roared over us at high speed. The thin roof of wooden beams bowed and the dirt ran in streams through the gaps, but it held. Those were the first ones. There were maybe three or four which rolled over our trench, there might even have been more. It's the same thing as trying to count the fingers when someone's hand has a hold on your head. Then we slowly crawled out of the trenches, so narrow that two men could barely get by one another.

Outside, all hell was loose. An SPW, not one of ours, had been shot into flames. There was still fairly heavy artillery fire coming down on our position. There were already a few destroyed T-34's scattered about, we don't know how or by whom, and the exploding ammunition increased the fireworks, which raged across the sector in suffocating clouds of powder smoke and in cracking, smashing detonations. Thank God, our vehicle was still intact. The Rottenführer ran to it through smoke and shell fire and was soon back with hollow charges and rifle and hand grenades. The other headquarters troops got what they needed. A few men were trying to get one of the captured antitank rifles to work, but the

beast wouldn't fire. Once again, the thunder was approaching us. It sounded like an approaching herd of galloping wild horses or a destructive stampede of buffalo, with the earth shaking under the waves of hoofs. In the meantime, the smoke and fumes had gotten so thick that our eyes were watering and our lungs hurt with each breath we took. It was vile and treacherous this poisonous yellow cloud, this moist and stinking breath of the modern god of war. The powerful forms of the oncoming tanks emerged from it as gray, ill-defined contours as they approached at top speed.

A clear defiant cry, almost jubilant, drew our eyes to the right. There was the commander, in a slight crouch, a rifle pressed to his shoulder with the grenade launcher on the barrel, following the gigantic, growing silhouette of a T-34 racing toward us in a raging, clanking rush. The battalion commander was only 30 years-old. He looked like a well-groomed, thoughtful actor in his photos; he enjoyed witty-ironic remarks. This young, battle-hard-ened troop leader was under tension like the spring of his rifle, which waited for the release of his trigger finger. Only the glittering Knight's Cross which shone from the collar of his camouflage smock shook a little, as if moved by slightly trembling nerves.

The Soviet tank thundered toward us, grew to gigantic size out of the obscuring mist, and roared across the ditch three meters away. At the same moment – the eardrums winced painfully – the commander's grenade struck it at its weakest point. It rolled on some 20 or 30 meters, then it stopped, trembling. Our cry of joy reached the Sturmbannführer who, happy and proud, laughed like a young boy with his teeth shining in his sunburned face."

"Today counts for the close combat badge, boys!" he shouted to the men. They were angry because the T-34's moved so rapidly that they were unable to use the hollow charges.

In the meantime the thin line of infantry which had covered our front had pulled back to us and deployed in the trenches and foxholes. "They're coming!" Had someone shouted that out or were we all aware of it at once? Shadowy figures emerged from the yellowish-white smoke which hung behind the tall grass in front of our trenches. Maybe they thought that their tanks had crushed everything or that we were cowering, blind with fear, at the bottom of our trenches. A machine gun began to rattle nearby. The commander's adjutant, a very young Untersturmführer (author: Wolff), who had destroyed a tank by himself the day before yesterday, was firing it. An Unterscharführer was lying to his right. He was looking for a target for his machine pistol and discovered a Bolshevik, crouching and making a hesitant approach. He couldn't have been more than 30 meters away. Then he had him in his sights but when he pressed the trigger all he heard was a soft, mocking click. Damn. What was wrong with this thing? In feverish haste, he tried one magazine after the other with the same result. A jam, which couldn't be cleared in a hurry.

In the meanwhile the shadow in front had gotten closer. Suddenly, the Unterscharführer was hit by a gigantic, frightening blow in front of him which caused him to keel over. Only later did he become aware of the resounding, shattering explosion of the hand grenade and the soft groan of the company commander who collapsed to his left. The Unterscharführer tried to get up but he couldn't. Something must have gone wrong with his feet. So as not to become an obstacle in the narrow trench, he crawled after the Hauptsturmführer, who, gasping, was being brought to shelter by two men.

Outside, it had gotten a little quieter. The commander arrived with a bottle of cognac which someone had gotten from our SPW. A swallow did us all good and we were all in a splendid mood. However, as things were getting rough outside again, the Sturmbannführer looked serious and warned us to keep our pistols ready. Don't let them take you alive! The last bullet for ourselves! The commander looked with satisfaction at his silvery pistol,

which had work to do again today. After he left his adjutant came by to see us. He still had an ammo belt around his neck. He told us with grim satisfaction that he had immediately killed the bastard right after he had thrown the grenade. The mood was really not what you would expect for a unit which had at least two dozen T-34's in its rear and waves of approaching infantry in front ...

In the shelter, we listened closely and tried to figure out what was happening from the noises outside. Then the headquarters section leader arrived – a quiet Austrian – and sat by his commander, whose orders he had read in his eyes yesterday. Now he himself only had one eye. The other was hidden behind thick bandages. Even the 08 which he held was already entirely red, as if it were lacquered with blood. (author: This Viennese soldier – SS-Unterscharführer Erich Pinczker – fought at the end of 1944 as an SS-Untersturmführer in the 2. Führer-Begleit-Kompanie.)

And then the commander was back. "Everybody up. A tank will take you back!" Four men carried the Hauptsturmführer to the tank which had stopped in front of this stretch of trench and which had to go back because of gun damage. This meant our unit and its attachments were no longer alone. The Unterscharführer pushed himself up out of the trench and found himself a place between the turret and the spaced armor. The headquarters section leader held his commander tightly, and then the tank moved off. The artillery fire had increased again, but none of the bursting, poisonous-spewing smoking shells came near it. At the antitank ditch, an ambulance picked up the wounded where they learned that of the 30 T-34's which rolled over the rear positions, not one made it back. They ran into our tanks and those that weren't destroyed by them were destroyed in close combat. Thus the seventh day came to an end for the wounded of Peiper's battalion in the comfortable darkness of the field hospital tent between the groaning and the dying. 42

SS-Obersturmführer Rudolf von Ribbentrop, commander of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, described the events of the day from the point of view of the Panzer-Regiment:

On the previous day we had fought our way across a Russian antitank ditch. The two other companies (author: 5. And 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1) had approached the ditch, while at the moment I was behind them as the reserve company ...

... This antitank ditch lay in a slight depression, as far as I remember, from which a slope about 800 meters long and 300 to 400 meters wide stretched toward Prochorowka. The infantry positions were somewhere on that hill ...

... Right in the middle of slurping hot Java, I began to think I was hallucinating or imagining things. There, within a few seconds, a wall of purple smoke appeared, generated by smoke shells, which had been the signal set for today: Tank warning! It only took a moment to drop the cup with its hot coffee and give the order: "Crank up and follow me!" I shouted over to the platoon leader, Malchow, "We're going up the slope in line. You take the left with your platoon. I'll take the right and center with the other three vehicles, and you bend the left wing back a bit, in case we get flanked. We'll go into position on the reverse slope and shoot at the Russians from there!"

... Arriving up at the ridge line of the gentle slope, we found another shallow fold in the ground some 200 meters further, behind a small depression, which apparently held the infantry positions. I radioed orders to go at top speed to the reverse slope in front of us and go into action there if necessary. The depression stretched to the left and, while we were still moving down the gentle slope, we detected T-34's at about 800 meters which apparently wanted to flank us on the left. We immediately stopped, still on the slope, and fired. We had several hits and stopped a few Russian tanks which started to burn.

... About 150 to 200 meters in front of us, coming out of the shallow depression, appeared 15, 20, 30, 40, and then an uncountable number of Russian T-34's which stormed toward us at top speed with infantry mounted on them. I had already kicked the gunner in the right side with my left foot, which meant turn the turret to the right as there were urgent targets to fire on. Soon the first shell was on its way and the first T-34 burst into flames only 50 meters away. At the same time, the vehicle next to me took a direct hit, and burst into flames immediately. I saw Unterscharführer Papke jump out; we never heard from him again. His neighbor to the right also took a direct hit and it too immediately burst into flames. Then this wall of tanks was rolling toward us. Tank after tank, wave after wave, an unimaginable mass of tanks coming at us at top speed. We could only shoot and at this range every shot was a hit – and wait until we too took a hit which would send us burning into the next world ... That was how we destroyed three or four more T-34's at very close range, under 30 meters.43

After he ran out of armor piercing shells, von Ribbentrop turned his tank and went along with the Russian tank pack behind the swell in the ground and destroyed another T-34 on the reverse slope. In order not to stand out immediately to the enemy as a stationary tank, von Ribbentrop decided to continue to go along with the Russian tank pack. He steered his Panzer IV in the middle of the T-34's toward the German lines. The danger of taking a hit from a T-34 at very close range was fairly high, as was the possibility of being shot at by his own troops:

In the meantime, the Russians had driven through the SPW-Bataillon and the artillery battalion, and had shot several vehicles on fire. But then the fire from the other two Panzer-Kompanien began to have effect. The self-propelled artillery battalion and Peiper's grenadiers — using their close-quarters antitank weapons — were also putting more and more Russian tanks out of action. They were also holding back the Russian infantry, who had jumped off their tanks because of the antitank fire. More and more waves of Russian tanks continued to appear and were shot down like rabbits by our tanks on that long slope. The indescribable confusion from smoke and fumes, burning wrecks of tanks and other vehicles, was more than likely to have contributed to our salvation.

Von Ribbentrop knocked out the Soviet tanks which were trying to pass him at close range. Near the bridge across the antitank ditch, toward which some of the Soviet tanks were steering in a final effort to save themselves, von Ribbentrop's tank was hit in the optics, wounding the gunner. Shortly afterwards, von Ribbentrop moved back into the battle in a another tank which had just been brought forward. In all, SS-Obersturmführer von Ribbentrop destroyed 14 Soviet tanks that day. On 15 July 1943 he was awarded the Knight's Cross.<sup>44</sup> His platoon leader, SS-Obersturmführer Walter Malchow, destroyed seven tanks.<sup>45</sup> The small number of tanks in the 6. Kompanie had acted as a breakwater opposing the flood of Soviet tanks.

The commanders of the 5. And 7. Panzer-Kompanien and the 13. Tiger-Kompanie also had considerable success. SS-Unterscharführer Hans Siptrott of the 7. Kompanie destroyed six T-34's and SS-Unterscharführer Theo Jensen of the 5. Kompanie destroyed 12.46 SS-Obersturmbannführer Frey, commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, wrote:

"With unshakable fighting spirit, the regiment made way against the oncoming flood of destruction. In close combat, in the truest sense of that expression, every weapon was aimed at the attacking tanks ... Grenadiers, using their close quarters antitank weapons, jumped onto the tanks, and put many out of commission. Soon the fighting raged under a blanket of heavy smoke which covered the battlefield, torn by the flashes of exploding

shells. The bitter fighting raged under its veil. I couldn't guess how long it lasted until we knew that the regiment, fighting for its very survival, was gaining the upper hand.<sup>47</sup>

SS-Obersturmbannführer Kraas, commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was wounded under the right eye by an antitank gun splinter. Numerous enemy tanks were destroyed by the Leibstandarte's Panzergrenadiere in close combat. Orders from the headquarters of the 4. Panzer-Armee were issued again to the LAH on 12 July 1943 where it was mandated:

"An enemy tank can only be counted as destroyed when it falls into German hands or it has burnt out in front of our lines". 48 On 12 July 1943 the Leibstandarte knocked out 192 Russian tanks.

The high command gave recognition to the deeds of the grenadiers of the Leibstandarte and their comrades in the "Das Reich" and "Totenkopf" Divisions:

"The Commander-in-Chief of Army Group South, Generalfeldmarschall von Manstein, offers his thanks and appreciation to the divisions of the II. SS-Panzer-Korps for their outstanding success and exemplary behavior in the fighting".<sup>49</sup>

On 13 July 1943 at 1000 hours, the Panzergruppe attacked the heights northeast of Swch. Oktjabrskij. It took them and then ran into a Pakfront on the reverse slope which forced it to break off the attack. The SPW-Bataillon's transportation element commander, SS-Obersturmführer Ratschko, was wounded. The maintenance element commander, SS-Obersturmführer Bloch, was also wounded but remained with the battalion.<sup>50</sup>

On this day, after a conference with the Commanders in Chief of Army Groups Center and South, Hitler decided to break off "Citadel".

On 14 July 1943 the LAH's Panzergruppe was in ready positions northeast of Komsomolez. The company trains for the 14. (schwere gepanzerte) Kompanie remained in Klenowoje during the offensive. The daughter of the village mayor, who was mentioned by SS-Untersturmführer Gührs in a preceding passage, laid flowers on the graves of the men of the 14. Kompanie who had been brought back and buried there. She visited the cemetery daily to read the names of those killed, some of whom she knew. Through 17 July 1943 the Leibstandarte was moved back with the Panzergruppe occupying the area west of Teterewino. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs wrote:

By the time we were pulled out of the position after four days, I had 15 dead and more than 35 wounded. Hannes Duffert was killed on the last morning, and Unterscharführer Kamprad (head-quarters section leader) was badly wounded. And me, I still had my guardian angel. On 13 July I was temporarily deaf. My left eardrum was ruptured. Before that, I had light scratches on the neck. I heard that Unterscharführer Lorenz was dead. I saw him later. Those were bad days, but full of proud successes. We were pulling back from the enemy, and nobody knew where. We were going to get two days of rest. How old our men have become!"51

On 17 July 1943 Gührs wrote: "I got the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the 13. Kompanie from Peiper. Obersturmführer Dinse, who just got back from leave, was supposed to take over my company. On the night before 18 July we resumed our move. We went into the area west of Belgorod. It's rumored that we were supposed to go to Stalino". 52

On 18 July 1943 10 Iron Crosses, 2nd Class were awarded, among them one to SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern of the 11. Kompanie. Peiper's Panzergrenadiere were given credit for close combat at the following places during the Kursk offensive.<sup>53</sup>

#### **Date** Location

6 July 1943 Attack on Teterewino Staff and 11., 12., 13. and 14. Komp.

8 July 1943 Attack on Rylskij

Staff and 11., 12., 13. and 14. Komp.

11 July 1943 Attack on Hill 252.2

Staff and 11., 12., 13. and 14. Komp.

12 July 1943 Tank battle south of Prochorowka

Staff and 11., 12., 13. and 14. Komp.

13 July 1943 Defensive fighting on Hill 252.2

Staff and 11., 12., 13. and 14. Komp.

During the evening the battalion was loaded on trains in Belgorod. Erhard Gührs:

On 20 July 1943 we left. During the night we stopped again. Our station had been bombed. The train had to be unloaded. A wonderful night. We were still in the station at noon. We cleaned our weapons and lay around in the beautiful sunshine. In the evening we were unloaded again at Sslawjansk. The Russians had established a bridgehead across the Donez.

On 21 July an officer issued us instructions at the railroad station. Then Sturmbannführer Peiper arrived. We occupied a woods and set up security.

On 22 July we found out how the war was going. Otherwise nothing new. It rained during the night.

23 July. Today I wrote letters to the parents of those killed in action. This is something that requires extraordinary consideration. Originally, we were supposed to attack this morning to clear up the situation there. Not yet. I met an agricultural official and got fruit for the company. We slept under canvas in the woods again. Almost every quarters area was in the forest. But as soon as it became dark, the Russian bombers arrived. There was a lot of activity in the air.

24 July 1943. At 0200 hours a messenger arrived: "Get ready to move out immediately!" It was noon before we left. 180 kilometers to the south. There has been one thunder storm after another.

25 July 1943. At noon we reached our new assembly area. But the front was still 15 kilometers away. Regarding the situation, we found out that the Russians had made a 12-kilometer deep breakthrough at Stalino. So once more, we were the "fire department". We took up quarters in separate houses. We had to dig in the vehicles and prepare bunkers. At night the planes were back. In the Wehrmacht Report for today, there was talk about a terror attack on Hamburg. I'm worried about my wife and parents.

26 July 1943. I was very nervous. The telephone rang right after I woke up. Motor Sergeant to the regiment. For sure that meant another train trip. At 0800 hours, I heard that the Duce had returned to Italy. At 1000 hours a commander's call with the commander. We were to rail load again at the Jassinowataja Railroad Station. We didn't know where we're going. Some were betting on Orel. However, I thought that we were going west.

At noon I gave the company a briefing on the political situation. Our men should also know about the crises that could arise for us in Italy. The company morale was very high. At noon I went to a local farmer to get us grease and honey. Unsuccessful. Air raid alarm during the night. 54

At 0150 hours on 27 July 1943 the Leibstandarte received orders to get ready for a "lightning-arrow" move. On 29 July 1943 Gührs wrote:

We also began to load up at 0300 hours this morning and at 0838 hours we left the railroad station. A funny feeling. This time I left a lot of good men here. I heard that Unterscharführer Kamprad and Bachmann were supposed to have died of their wounds. The Russians were already back where Duffert and Dreyer were buried. I asked myself why I'm still alive. 55



On 5 July 1943 the offensive at Kursk, Operation "Citadel" started.



Air attacks on Soviet positions helped the advance move forward.



Combat engineers blow up sections of antitank ditch to enable friendly tanks and assault guns to cross.



The SPW-Bataillon engaged in heavy fighting.



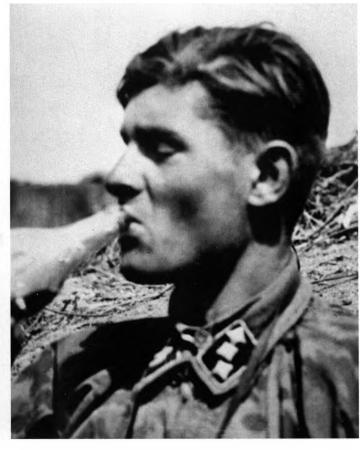
Panzergrenadiere of the 7./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in the antitank ditch which had been taken after hard fighting on 5 July 1943.



Peiper at a commander's call with company commanders. Guhl (11. Kompanie) (front) and Wandt (13. Kompanie). His adjutant, Werner Wolff, on the left.



The commander, Jochen Peiper, shows the strain of the heavy "Citadel" fighting during the hot July days of 1943.



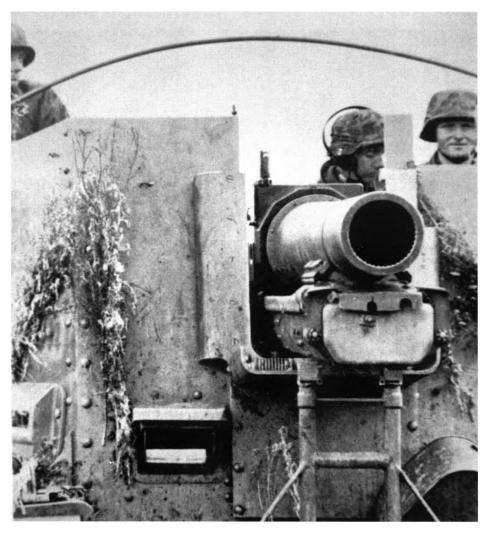
SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff takes a drink to fortify himself after a hard day of fighting.



Panzer IV of the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 LAH attack.



Dismounted Panzergrenadier of the SPW-Battalion behind a carrier.



SS-Oberscharführer RFA Bernd von Bergmann, assistant platoon leader of the infantry gun platoon of the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, in his Grille wearing headphones. The gun loader, SS-Sturmmann Ernst Lübbers, on the right.



Grillen conducting individual direct firing. In front: The platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Otto Bölck, who was mortally wounded on 12 July 1943.



Peiper follows the progress of his battalion's attack from a trench.



The inner tension registers on Jochen Peiper's face.



A platoon leader's SPW with a 3.7 cm antitank gun.



Peiper up front watching an attack. On the left, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, his adjutant and, on the right, an officer of the Panzer Regiment.



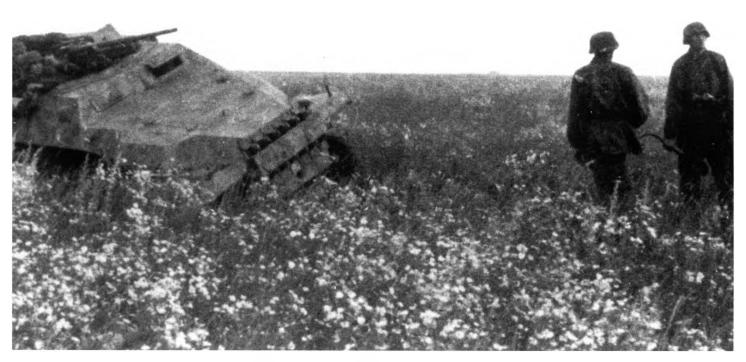
SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff and Peiper up front in a trench.



A Panzergrenadier on board Peiper's SPW. Morale was good in spite of the heavy fighting and the intense heat.



SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff destroyed a Soviet T-34 tank in close combat on 10 July 1943.



A SPW with a  $3.7\ cm$  antitank gun has found a target.



The 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie: a Grille (left) and an antitank gun (right).



The Grille platoon of the Leibstandarte's SPW-Bataillon proved to be a powerful weapon during Operation "Citadel".



Panzergrenadiere advancing in the blistering heat during Operation "Citadel" in July 1943. A "Marder" ("Marten") tank destroyer in the rear.



SS-Unterscharführer Hannes Duffert on the last SPW with a 7.5 cm infantry gun in the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie. He was killed on 12 July 1943.



SPW and tanks of SS-Panzer Regiment 1 roll north.



A SS-Oberscharführer in a SPW equipped with an antitank gun keeps a lookout for the enemy while in the lead attack elements of the battalion.



Direct hit on a Soviet tank; picture taken from a SPW.

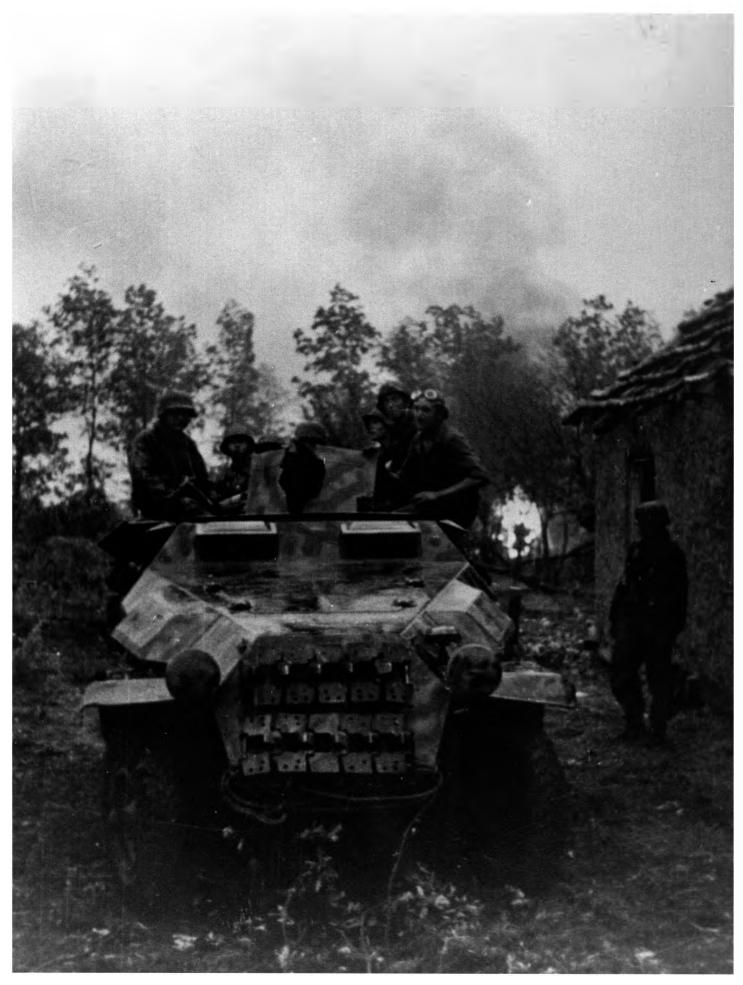


SPW with an antitank gun.



Peiper's adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, especially distinguished himself during the armor battle at Prochowka on 12 July 1943, for which he received the Knight's Cross on 7 August 1943.







SS-Hauptsturmführer Siegfried Wandt, commander of the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 during the Kursk Offensive, until he was wounded on 12 July1943.



SS-Sturmmann Hermann Dähne, 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Unterscharführer Kurt Butenhoff, driver in the antitank platoon of the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Rottenführer Paul Zwigart, SPW driver in the 11. (gep.) Kompanie.



Grenadiers taking cover under artillery fire.

SS-Unterscharführer Franz Singer, SPW driver in the 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Hauptscharführer Wilhelm Haferstroh, platoon leader of the engineer platoon of the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, from the fall of 1942 until his death on 3 September 1944.



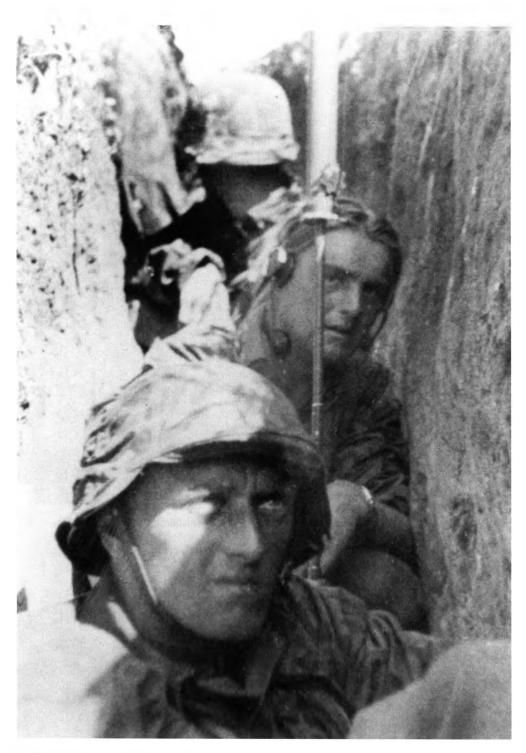


Jochen Peiper awards a Panzergrenadier of his SPW-Bataillon the Iron Cross, 2nd Class during the Kursk Offensive. In the rear, his adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff.

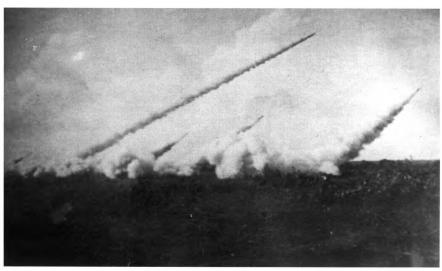








Short break in a trench which has just been taken. The radioman stands by.



Rocket launchers of the Leibstandarte.



Peiper pinning the Iron Cross, 2nd Class on the camouflage smock of a Panzergrenadier.



SS-Obersturmbannführer Albert Frey (left) (commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1), SS-Oberführer Theodor Wisch and Jochen Peiper.



SS-Sturmmann Rudi Nadler destroyed two tanks on 8 July 1943 and a third one on 12 July 1943 in close combat.



SPW during the attack. The crew crouches down since the vehicle is receiving enemy fire. A Grille can be seen behind it.



Rudi Nadler after having been promoted to SS-Unterscharführer and awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class and three tank destruction badges (Panzervernichtungsabzeichen).



SS-Sturmmann Erich Schöbel – here as a SS-Unterscharführer – of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was wounded on 11 July 1943.



Motor sergeant's truck for the 12. (gep.) Kompanie with the blow torch painted on the door.



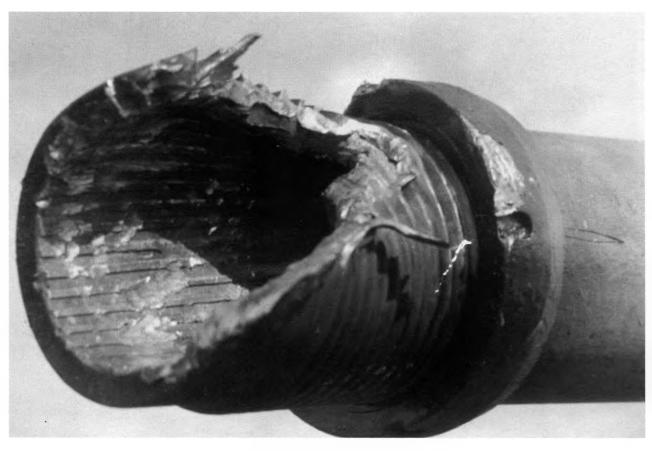
13 July 1943: The day after the armor battle at Prochorowka. A knocked-out Soviet T-34.



Soldiers of the Leibstandarte examining a destroyed Soviet T-34.



Shell-damaged Leibstandarte Tiger from the Kursk Offensive.



Leibstandarte Tiger with muzzle damage.



SS-Sturmmann Heinz Buchner (right) on the Tiger with 51 rings on the barrel for the kills he made prior to 12 July 1943.



Tank 546 of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, commanded by SS-Unterscharführer Wilcke (middle). Right: SS-Sturmmann Manthey (driver).



SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling, commander of the 13. (Tiger)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, worked well with Peiper's SPW-Bataillon during the Kursk Offensive. He is shown here after being wounded on 11 July 1943.



The fallen soldiers of the SPW-Bataillon were buried with military honors.





The graves of SS-Unterscharführer Willi Bott, 11. (gep.) Kompanie and SS-Sturmmann Henry Wehrs who were killed in action on 11 July 1943.



# The Leibstandarte in Italy: 5 August to 24 October 1943

The situation for the Germans' Italian allies took a dramatic turn for the worse when the Americans landed in Sicily right in the middle of the Kursk Offensive. Morale in the Italian forces was already extremely low, and so the Germans had to expect that Italy would rapidly collapse. This would put the hard-fighting German forces on the southern front in great danger. In order to get the situation in northern Italy completely under control, the Leibstandarte was assigned to go from Innsbruck by road through the south Tyrol into northern Italy, secure the Brennerù Verona road and disarm Italian units stationed in the Po valley as soon as Italy dropped out of the alliance.

On 2 August 1943 the first train carrying the Leibstandarte arrived in Innsbruck. The elements arriving on 2 August and 3 August were given Trient as the objective for their march. During the night of 4 August 1943 the 13. (gep.) Kompanie of the SPW-Bataillon detrained at Innsbruck. The company commander, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, wrote in his diary:

... It was a lovely trip. We traveled for five days in really beautiful weather without incident. But even so, yesterday one of my vehicles almost burned up ... According to all reports from bombed out Hamburg, our lovely city was now a pile of rubble. We were going back into action with that on our minds. Maybe it was the best mood for waging war against the British and the Americans. This is a wonderful region. We're in the middle of the mountains. Lovely landscape.

During the afternoon of 4 August 1943 Peiper held a commander's conference with all of his company commanders. On 5 August he led the wheeled elements of his battalion on a road march from Innsbruck across the Brenner, through Brixen and Bozen to Trient and submitted a transportation request for the larger tracked elements of the battalion to the divisional operations officer. The men were given an enthusiastic greeting as they traveled through the south Tyrol and were well supplied with wine and fruit by the local population.

On 7 August 1943 the battalion adjutant of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, was decorated with the Knight's Cross. This aggressive, brave, young officer received this, the highest award for bravery, for his actions in the armor battle at Prochorowka on 12 July 1943. The 20-year-old Wolff from Memel was the youngest officer in the battalion and his youthful enthusiasm led him to idolize Peiper, who was certainly fond of him.² Jochen Peiper received the Panzervernichtungsabzeichen (Tank Destruction Badge) on 21 July 1943, which was also awarded to Wolff and to those grenadiers in the battalion who had destroyed a tank in close combat during Operation "Citadel". SS-Rottenführer Gnnther Vogel and Erich Jost of the 14. (s.gep.) Kompanie are known to have received it. <sup>3</sup>

The II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 received new Panzer IV's at the Parma and Reggio railroad stations and, on 10 August, the Panthers for the newly-refitted I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 arrived there. The divisional command post was located in Garda where the Commander-in-Chief of Army Group South, Generalfeld-marschall Rommel, showed up for a visit.

On 13 August 1943 the SPW-Bataillon arrived in Trient and was ordered to move to the western outskirts of Verona on the following day.<sup>4</sup> In case of a crisis, the Leibstandarte was to provide support from the south for the 44. Infanterie Division occupying the Brenner sector.

On 19 August 1943 SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 moved into the area of Reggio Emilia-South Polodenza-Scandiano. After the hard months of privation in Russia the Leibstandarte's exhausted soldiers found their transfer to Italy interesting and pleasant. Jochen Peiper organized sightseeing flights for the men of the battalion in an Italian aircraft. Contact was quickly made with the temporal and spiritual authorities in the Italian villages. The Mayor of Mondovi invited SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt, commander of the 11. Kompanie, and some of his men to a meal.5 On 28 August 1943 the men of the battalion threw a party and on 30 August 1943 there was a sporting competition with some army units. Peiper's adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, winner of the Knight's Cross, did well for the battalion in boxing and saber fencing.6 During August the battalion marched, singing, through the city of Reggio-Emilia, with Jochen Peiper, Werner Wolff and Paul Guhl in the first rank. This impressive march was filmed for the newsreels and recorded for

SS-Oberscharführer Vieten was transferred from the 12. to the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie and took command of the Grille platoon. The remaining 1.5 ton SPW with antitank rifles in the 14. Kompanie were turned in. SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Breme took over the post of battalion surgeon from Dr. Brüstle who had been wounded. The first Nahkampfspangen (Close Combat Badges) were awarded in the Leibstandarte on 1 September 1943. Although a request had been made to the units on 12 April 1943 to present the Nahkampfspange, nothing had been done until September. Before this rest period in Italy, the unit commanders didn't have the time to examine each soldier's pay book to verify the close combat days he had participated in.

The following officers of the SPW-Bataillon were awarded the Close Combat Badge in Bronze:

SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, Bataillon Adjutant

SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, Commander of the 12. Kompanie

SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, Commander of the 14. Kompanie

SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl, Commander of the 11. Kompanie

SS-Untersturmführer Dieter Kohl, Platoon Leader in the 12. Kompanie

SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Babick, Platoon Leader in the 12. Komp.

SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern of the 11. Kompanie

SS-Obersturmführer Rudolf Marlin

SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Robert Brüstle, Surgeon

SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Friedrich Breme, Surgeon

Numerous noncommissioned officers and men were also awarded the Nahkampfspange in Bronze which was highly regarded everywhere as a visible symbol of a frontline soldier. In Peiper's battalion, proportionally speaking, there were clearly more soldiers with this badge than in the other two battalions of the 2. Regiment of the LAH. A few of them are noted here:

# 11. Kompanie

SS-Hauptscharführer Max Leike

SS-Unterscharführer Max Rode

SS-Sturmmann Erich Schöbel

## 12. Kompanie

SS-Oberscharführer Karl Kaspari

SS-Rottenführer Paul Singer (SPW driver)

SS-Panzergrenadier Kurt Becher

SS-Sturmmann Heinz Kohlmann (18 years-old)

# 13. Kompanie

SS-Unterscharführer Hans-Jürgen Bahrendt

SS-Unterscharführer Josef Krebs

SS-Unterscharfnhrer Rudolf Jentzsch (medic)

## 14. Kompanie

SS-Sturmmann Toni Motzheim (Pionier-Zug)

SS-Sturmmann Willi Pluschke (Pionier-Zug)

#### **Bataillon Communications Staff**

SS-Sturmmann Adalbert Klein

The following men received the Nahkampfspange in Bronze for their days of close combat during the battle for Kharkov:

SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, Bataillon Adjutant (during Kharkov)

Commanders of the 12., 13., and 14. Kompanien (during Kharkov): Bormann, Pinter, and Kolitz.

Altogether, 178 officers, noncommissioned officers and men in the SPW-Bataillon received the Nahkampfspange in Bronze.<sup>7</sup> Only the Nahkampfspange in Bronze was awarded on 1 September 1943. However, there was documentation to show that some members of the battalion clearly had more than the 15 days of close combat required for the Nahkampfspange in Bronze. For example, SS-Rottenfnhrer Paul Zwigart of the 11. Kompanie already had 34 confirmed days of close combat in his pay book by 12 July 1943.<sup>8</sup>

As battalion commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper was not awarded the Nahkampfspange in Bronze from the regiment but from the division. For that reason he was not mentioned among those soldiers in SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 who received the Nahkampfspange in Bronze on 1 September 1943. He received it on 7 September 1943. Since he also had more than 30 confirmed days of close combat by the end of the Kursk Offensive, he became the first man in the battalion to receive the Nahkampfspange in Silver. 9 Jochen Peiper was one of the first in the division to be awarded this coveted and highly respected decoration. In addition, 121 Panzerkampfabzeichen in Bronze were awarded to Peiper's battalion on 1 September 1943. The transportation element commander, SS-Obersturmführer Ratschko, received the War Service Cross, 1st Class, with Swords. That same day there was an officers' call at the regimental command post which all officers and officer cadets were ordered to attend.10

On 16 September 1943, the Iron Cross, 1st Class was awarded to:

SS-Untersturmführer Dieter Kohler (Platoon Leader in the 12. Kompanie)

SS-Hauptsturmführer Siegfried Wandt (wounded commander of the 13. Kompanie)

### 11. Kompanie

SS-Unterscharführer Heinz Bleissner

SS-Unterscharführer Kurt Israel (Guhl's SPW driver)

SS-Rottenführer Josef Willinger (SPW driver)

SS-Sturmmann Willi Wolff

## 12. Kompanie

SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Vieten (Platoon Leader of the heavy weapons platoon)

# 13. Kompanie

SS-Hauptscharführer Alfred Martin (Platoon Leader)

SS-Rottenführer Willi Eichmann

## 14. Kompanie

SS-Hauptscharführer Wilhelm Haferstroh (Combat Engineer Platoon Leader)

SS-Rottenführer Erich Jost (Antitank Rifle Section Leader) SS-Rottenführer Günther Vogel (Antitank Rifle Section

The Iron Cross, 2nd Class was awarded to 78 noncommissioned officers and men. Except for the Knight's Cross to SS-Untersturmfnhrer Werner Wolff, none of the higher decorations for combat bravery were awarded in the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. This is astonishing inasmuch as the High Command of the Army (OKH) had ordered during the Kursk Offensive that recommendations for inclusion in the Honor Roll of the German Army were to be submitted as rapidly as possible by teletype. Qualifications for this award were to be personal acts which were not sufficient for the Knight's Cross. The OKH order was forwarded to the divisions by the II. SS-Panzer-Korps on 9 July 1943, along with the comment that "...It must be pointed out that we expect considerable use of this opportunity given the victorious fighting at present."

Jochen Peiper was very reserved in his recommendations for the highest awards. An Oberscharfnhrer in the SPW-Bataillon, whom Peiper's adjutant, Wolff, regarded as deserving of the award of the Knight's Cross, was not recommended by Peiper. He had especially high standards for his recommendations for such awards.<sup>12</sup> (In this instance, the man concerned was probably Oberscharführer Walter Braasch of the 13. Kompanie).<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps Peiper inherited the Prussian tradition where the Prussian Generals Zieten and Ferdinand von Braunschweig wouldn't recommend a single officer for a decoration during the Seven Years War, as they were of the opinion that bravery on the part of a Prussian officer was to be taken for granted. On 26 August 1943 Jochen Peiper recommended the commander of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, for the award of the German Cross in Gold for his performance at Kharkov and during the Kursk Offensive. This request was rejected in Berlin, however.

On 2 September 1943 all units began their training as ordered and on 3 September 1943 SS-Hauptsturmfnhrer Bormann was put in charge of a noncommissioned officer course for the 2. Regiment. Twenty-nine men of the SPW-Bataillon participated, with SS-Oberscharführer Harland of the 11. Kompanie as platoon leader and the SS-Unterscharführer Rothe (11. Kompanie), Schall (12. Kompanie), Kieferle and Krebs (13. Kompanie) as instructors.<sup>14</sup>

On 11 September 1943 the maintenance officer, SS-Obersturmführer Bloch, was transferred to the Hitlerjugend Division. SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl, who was on leave starting 2 September 1943, was sent to a battalion commander's course at the armor school at Versailles, and SS-Obersturmfnhrer Hans Schmidt took over acting command of the 11. Kompanie. SS-Untersturmführer Herbert Niemeyer was sent to a company commander's course in Paris.<sup>15</sup>

The position of the Italians was no longer exactly clear. On 8 September 1943 the Italian King was still assuring the German ambassador, Dr. Rudolf Rahn, that he would remain loyal to Germany and his treaty obligations. A few hours later Rahn was informed by the Italian Foreign Minister that Badoglio had

unconditionally surrendered to the Allies. The Italians had spent weeks secretly negotiating with the Allies without informing their German partners. During the night the royal family, Badoglio and several ministers fled Rome and went by an Italian naval vessel to the allied forces in southern Italy. Hitler had already suspected such a betrayal on the part of the Italians. German units alone then had to take responsibility for the defense of Italy.

At around 1800 hours on 8 September 1943 the divisional staff of the Leibstandarte was informed that Italy had capitulated. At 2025 hours the II. SS-Panzer-Korps ordered: "Highest Alert Status. H-hour 0100 on 9 September 1943." Units of the Leibstandarte reached the Italian barracks at 0100 hours on 9 September and demanded the units surrender their arms. The "Panther"-Bataillon provided security in Reggio and a tank company was sent to the airport, where an Italian had said that allied units would land during the night. At 0105 hours Peiper's SPW-Bataillon was ordered by division to reinforce the "Panther"-Bataillon in Reggio. Starting at 0105 hours the battalion occupied the post offices and railroad stations and disarmed the barracks. At 0500 hours the artillery barracks in Reggio was disarmed and shortly thereafter Peiper reported that his mission had been accomplished and that he was moving back to his billeting area.

The Italian garrisons in Verona were disarmed by the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and the assault gun battalion, in Fonton by the reconnaissance battalion, in Mantua by the Pionier-Bataillon, in Castelducchio by the supply battalion and in Albina by the staff of the 2. Regiment. In Parma the Italians were disarmed by the I./1. regiment, in South Secundo and Fidenza by the II./1. Regiment and the Panzerjäger-Abteilung, and the strong garrison at Cremona was disarmed by the I. and III/1. Regiment. Six hundred fifty officers and 16,599 men were taken prisoner, not counting the garrisons of Cremona and Verona. After virtually all the Italians were disarmed, it became known that the Italians could revert to civilian status once their weapons had been surrendered or could join the Wehrmacht as auxiliaries. Martial law was declared in the entire corps area. On 10 September 1943 all units of the Leibstandarte were engaged in disarming additional Italian units. Moving from Reggio Peiper's Bataillon went to Alessandria and Asti at 2400 hours and disarmed the Italians without encountering any resistance.

The II./SS-Panzer-grenadier-Regiment 2 occupied Turin, while SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 reached the suburbs of Milan and engaged in negotiations with the Italian General Roatta, who gave a radio broadcast to the inhabitants which had a calming effect. Among other things, he mentioned that the King of Italy had deserted. That day it became known that Italians in the south of Italy were openly fighting against their former German allies. As an immediate result, all Italian soldiers were treated as prisoners of war and the SPW-Bataillon was responsible for the organization of transport for the prisoners. After requesting a march number from the transport commander at the Turin Railroad Station, the trains moved off towards Germany. Men of the battalion escorted the prisoners as far as Innsbruck. The collection point for the 2. Regiment was located in the cavalry barracks at Turin, Corso Stupinigo.

On 11 September1943 the SPW-Bataillon marched from Asti to Alba and Bra, where it disarmed the Italians in an orderly fashion and, by 0930 hours, the Italians in Alba had voluntarily surrendered their weapons. The men of the Leibstandarte gained a lot of

replacement equipment and vehicles from Italian stocks. Tropical clothing was also worn in Peiper's Bataillon. During the disarmament eight men from the 13. (gep.) Kompanie managed to get an entire barracks full of soldiers to surrender. The commander of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, took the personnel of an entire Italian officer's school prisoner.

In spite of provocations by the inhabitants, disarmament in Turin proceeded as planned; Milan was occupied and the Italian troops there were allowed to keep their arms. The transport of the prisoners to Mantua began. By 1130 hours on 12 September 1943 Peiper's battalion had moved into Cuneo, where elements of the 11. Kompanie found that the Italian soldiers had fled and the inhabitants had looted the barracks. The staff of the 2. Regiment moved to Chivasso.

By the end of 11 September (inclusive), as a result of disarmament, the Leibstandarte had taken 106,046 Italians prisoner and had captured numerous vehicles, along with 428 machine guns, 38,591 rifles, 391 aircraft, 27 tanks, 49 flak, etc. The division reported to the II. SS-Panzer-Korps that strong elements of the Italian Army were moving into the mountains southwest of Turin and regrouping there. On 14 September the SPW-Bataillon took an Italian general from the 44th Army prisoner in Cuneo. Peiper was ordered to continue with the disarmament south of Cuneo. The reconnaissance battalion was ordered to disarm Italian units along the Cuneo-Breglio road and make contact with the 19. Armee in Breglio.

On 15 September 1943 the SPW-Bataillon and the reconnaissance battalion moved south. Peiper's men disarmed Limone and Tenda. On 16 September the SPW-Bataillon encountered resistance south of Cuneo and had to use its heavy weapons. The disarming process lasted until 1700 hours and it continued into the night in the Boves-Chiusa area. Peiper set up his battalion command post in Cuneo and SS-Obersturmführer Dinse became the city commandant. On 18 September an Italian lieutenant colonel, who introduced himself to Peiper as a "parlementaire" from the Italian 4th Army, arrived in Cuneo and "requested" that Peiper evacuate the province of Cuneo within the next twenty-four hours, otherwise his battalion would be completely destroyed. He believed that he had to point out that the SPW-Bataillon would have no chance in the mountains.<sup>17</sup>

Peiper immediately issued a call to the local inhabitants not to allow the 4th Army to embroil them in combat with German troops and had pamphlets printed and distributed by air over the mountains to the south of Cuneo, which requested the 4th Army lay down its arms. Peiper drove to Boves and gave strict warning to the mayor of the consequences, according to international martial law, which would befall the inhabitants of Boves should they join Italian soldiers and bandits. Southwest of Cuneo in the Maritime Alps, the SPW-Bataillon was facing strong elements of the 4th Army, which were constantly receiving partisan reinforcements. The town of Boves and the slopes of Monte Bisalta behind it, lying some six kilometers to the south of Cuneo, were the center of this region of bandits. That problems were developing there became evident to Peiper, especially after the impudent appearance of the lieutenant colonel.

A detailed look at the events of the following day is necessary here, as they led to a judicial inquiry in 1965 against Jochen Peiper and his company commanders at the time, Erhard Gührs and Otto Dinse. On the morning of 19 September the motor sergeant for the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie, SS-Oberscharführer Karl

Wiezoreck, and an assistant, SS-Unterscharführer Kurt Butenhoff, drove from Cuneo to Boves in a Kübelwagen, in order to look for replacement parts in a depot abandoned by the Italians. As they drove into the market square at Boves, they were taken prisoner by Italian soldiers who were there with two trucks. Wiezoreck and Butenhoff had to get into a truck and watched some of the people of Boves load the trucks with food and ammunition. Afterwards, they were blindfolded and taken into the mountains south of Boves. There they were interrogated by Italian officers who were looking for information on the strength and organization of the battalion, but the two men gave them no information. Afterwards they were locked in a round tower next to a chapel and guarded by two Italians. There was a hotel close by.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time the SPW-Bataillon was once more searching the barracks which had already been disarmed. Towards noon, the city commandant of Cuneo, SS-Obersturmführer Dinse, was informed by the Italian police at Boves that two men from the battalion had been taken prisoner by Italian soldiers. Dinse reported this incident immediately to Peiper, who ordered him to recover the abducted men. Dinse then headed for Boves with a heavy truck and SPW escort – in all some ten soldiers – to release the men of his 14. Kompanie.

In Boves Dinse's group encountered a strange atmosphere. Although it was noon, it was deathly quiet and the shutters were closed on the windows of the houses. In the market place Dinse learned from the Italian police that the abducted men had been taken into the nearby mountains and were presumably to be found at a so-called transshipment point, only a few kilometers south of Boves. Dinse suggested to the Italian police officer that he accompany him to negotiate with the Italian soldiers, which he declined to do. Dinse then drove off towards the point indicated.

About one kilometer south of Boves, he noticed that there were Italian soldiers along the towering mountain slopes on both sides of the road, apparently waiting to cut off the German group. Dinse's small group was at a disadvantage to the enemy in this narrow mountain valley. Dinse ordered his vehicles to stop and reported the precarious situation to Peiper by radio. He received orders to pull back to the southern edge of Boves, where Peiper himself would join them. At this moment, the Italians opened fire from the slopes above.

Dinse ordered SS-Sturmmann Willi Steinmetz to dismount with his machine gun to cover them while they turned around. Some of the men were already wounded, and Steinmetz was killed by a shot through the head. The leader of the engineer platoon, Haferstroh, then threw smoke grenades, which provided concealment from enemy view while they turned around. Steinmetz' body could not be recovered at that time. SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper alerted the 14. and 13. Kompanien and arrived at Boves with those units at 1300 hours.

The commander of the 13. Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, described the situation: "I was briefed on the situation by Peiper and he ordered me to take a platoon to Boves immediately. Further instructions there. I put Untersturmführer Taferner's platoon of SPW on alert. Elements of Dinse's 14. Kompanie were already outside Boves." Outside the village, Peiper instructed Gührs to bypass Boves on the left, then Peiper himself started on through Boves to Dinse's element. Peiper reported:

We were greeted by heavy rifle and machine gun fire from the

houses and the surrounding mountain slopes. The hand grenades thrown down from the slopes were especially dangerous to our open-topped armored personnel carriers. The unit took casualties. In my own SPW, we were hit by a machine gun burst from above which killed a radioman, wounded another man, put holes in my jacket, and destroyed my radio. Since the enemy could not be seen - fighting from the houses and from the heavy cover of the surrounding terrain - and since the armored personnel carriers were not suited for fighting within a village, I ordered my unit to pull back to the entrance to the village. I had the Grillen fire on the section of the village facing us to prepare for a rapid push through the village to my surrounded men. This set a number of houses on fire. Under the protection of the growing clouds of smoke, the enemy - in both uniform and civilian clothes - pulled back to a part of the village which could be reached only through a narrow gap in the mountains and which was not visible from our positions.21

Peiper moved out. He was then able to pass through Boves and reach Dinse's elements at the other end of the village. There, Peiper discussed his intentions to release the two prisoners and recover Steinmetz' body with his officers, Dinse and Gührs. The SPW moved out and the remains of the 19-year-old Steinmetz were recovered. At that point mortar fire and artillery fire began to rain down in the narrow mountain valley. Peiper ordered the Grillen to reply to this fire. The two hostages in the tower, Wiezoreck and Butenhoff, had already been able to hear the rattle of the tracks on the Grillen. When those guns opened fire on the Italian mortar positions, the Italians fled and Wiezoreck and Butenhoff took the opportunity to escape. They recognized their comrades on a mountain slope and indicated their position by waving handkerchiefs. The Kampfgruppe ceased fire and started back to Boves. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs commented on his experiences there:

I was ordered to take my platoon around Boves to the left, in order to pull Dinse out as quickly as possible. As I had to expect enemy resistance, we moved forward ready to fight. As we were moving past a narrow defile with wooded slopes on either side, the Italians opened fire on our SPW which were defenseless from the top. I immediately had three wounded in my company headquarters vehicle, including our medic Jentzsch. We returned fire at once and tossed out smoke grenades to prevent the enemy from hitting us with aimed fire. A sixth sense kept me from simply breaking through forward. There was a bend in the road ahead of us which we could not see around, and in the middle of that road there was a heavy artillery piece ready to take us under direct fire. I ran back to Peiper's vehicle which was perhaps two or three vehicles behind me. We surveyed the situation and pulled the vehicles back out of the defile. Peiper then shifted over to the 14. Kompanie, which was also fighting, while we fought the enemy independently. It was soon quiet in our area. I then received an order from Peiper by radio to come over to Boves to discuss the situation.

Peiper assembled his men at the north edge of Boves and had them move back to Cuneo. The Grille platoon remained behind for a short time in Boves as a rear guard and to destroy the large number of weapons lying around there. Jochen Peiper: "Upon our return to Cuneo, the Italian Prefect, General Salvi, offered me the government's deepest regrets for the incident at Boves, and disassociated himself in the name of the administration

from those events, for which he claimed the communists alone bore the responsibility."<sup>22</sup>

The Italians testified later that Peiper had sent out two parlementaires to recover the abducted men and the body, but the prosecuting First Major Criminal Division of the Stuttgart District Court didn't believe them, however. The Italian denial that they had fired on the SPW advancing toward Boves was also false. In the book, *Cuneo at the Dawn of Fascism*, it states: "... that on 19 September 1943 a battle was in progress in the city named above between Germans and a formation of the partisans". On 31 December 1943 and 3 January 1944, there was renewed fighting in Boves between German units and Italian partisans.

On 30 November 1965 Boves received the Gold Medal for Military Courage on the basis of the events of 19 September 1943 and bragged that it was the "cradle of the armed resistance in the Piedmont".<sup>24</sup> This alone clearly shows that Boves at that time could in no way be considered as a peaceful little city. Because of the Grille bombardment, there was unavoidable collateral damage, houses caught fire and 23 inhabitants were killed. More than 20 years later – spurred on by interested Italian circles – co-plaintiff Dr. Robert Kempner fabricated an accusation of cold-blooded murder of these inhabitants as opposed to a purely military operation, which was also dismissed by the Stuttgart District Court as unprovable.

According to a motion by the District Attorney before the Stuttgart District Court on 12 December 1968, there was no case against the accused, and the proceedings were closed on 23 December 1968. SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs adds:

Before the action at Boves I was ordered by Peiper to request inhabitants in the surrounding villages to ask soldiers and the vagrant Italian partisans to surrender their weapons. There was no force used in carrying out this order. Quite the contrary, I received the Order of the Heart of Jesus from an Italian delegation from my district for the re-establishment of law and order. Peiper reported this to the divisional commander.<sup>25</sup>

On 20 September1943, Peiper took his own preventative measures:

On the following day I sent one of my companies to Pevragno, a village in a region where we could expect similar ambushes. To my delight, the mayor of this village had considerable influence on his still armed countrymen and stated that he was decidedly against the developing crises incited by allied agents, and thus worked for compromise and the prevention of further attacks.<sup>36</sup>

Peiper sent an officer to Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring with a personal report of the action in Boves. Kesselring approved it in its entirety.<sup>27</sup> On 23 September 1943 Generalfeldmarschall Rommel issued the following special order:

Any sort of sentimental restraint by German soldiers towards the bandits sympathetic to Badoglio and still wearing the uniforms of our former comrades-in-arms is entirely inappropriate. Whoever among these men fights against German soldiers has lost any right to protection and is to be treated with the severity deserved by a rabble which suddenly turns its weapons against its friends ... <sup>28</sup>

On 4 October 1943 Peiper pulled his battalion back to Cuneo and on 16 October to Felizzano – Nizza and set up the battalion

command post in Felizzano.<sup>29</sup> After two of SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs' brothers had been killed in Russia, the division received a request from the parents, asking that their last remaining son, Erhard, be spared frontline duty, which was quite legitimate according to the law. In a long conversation in Cuneo, however, Gührs presented his reasons to Peiper for wishing to remain on frontline duty. Peiper agreed and Gührs kept the 13. Kompanie.<sup>30</sup> The next few days passed without anything of particular note.

On 20 October 1943 Army Group B informed the Leibstandarte it was to return soon to the Eastern Front. The units requested winter equipment for the vehicles and winter clothing for the men. On 22 October the Leibstandarte was redesignated a Panzer-Division and, in addition, all SS divisions and regiments were renumbered consecutively. The SPW-Bataillon was then officially designated the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH. Starting 20 October there was considerable confusion in the issue of orders concerning the transfer of the Leibstandarte to the Eastern Front. In the end, the division was to be moved to the St. Pölten area, receive winter equipment and then load back on the trains in a tactically sensible order. This order was rescinded, which resulted in the division arriving on the Eastern Front in a tactically unfavorable organization: with the tracked elements of the division first, then the half-track and wheeled elements of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, the wheeled elements of the 2. Regiment and the divisional staff, the supply battalion, the reconnaissance battalion, the III./SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment, the medical battalion and, finally, the rest of the division's wheeled elements.

Those elements of the artillery regiment and the signals battalion which had detrained in Austria were loaded back up, while the reinforced SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, which was still fighting partisans in Yugoslavia, didn't entrain until 7 November 1943 and followed in the third march order. During the move to the railload site on 24 October 1943, Peiper's battalion was attached to the Panzer regiment.<sup>31</sup> The first elements of the battalion got on the train in Alessandria during the afternoon of 26 October.<sup>32</sup>

The situation on the Eastern Front had changed in the previous months. General Konjew's 2nd Ukrainian Front had been able to establish three bridgeheads across the Dnieper east of Krementshug by the middle of October. Dnieperopetrowsk fell on 25 October 1943 and another enemy advance headed for the industrial region around Krowoi Rog. Von Manstein's Army Group South launched a counterattack by the 1. Panzer-Armee against this threat by Konjew, and it achieved some success. During this period the Soviets were able to take Melitopol from Army Group A in the south, which endangered the Crimean Isthmus at Perekop. The 1st Ukrainian Front under Army General Watutin launched an attack on both sides of Kiev on 3 November 1943, with 30 infantry divisions, 24 tank brigades, and 10 motorized infantry brigades. This was a major attack on Kiev and it fell into Watutin's hands on 6 November. The village of Fastow, 60 kilometers to the west of Kiev, was an important detraining point for the Leibstandarte. It fell into enemy hands on 7 November 1943. On 11 November the Russians were in Radomyschl on the Teterew River and on 13 November they captured Shitomir.



On 29 July 1943, the SPW-Bataillon began its move to Italy. Here: Grillen of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie.



The 11. (gep.) Kompanie in transit. SS-Rottenführer Fritz Thier (front right), SS-Unterscharführer Heinz "Pike" Bliesener, (behind Thier), Heinz Schmidt (behind Bliesener) Fritz Karg (far right rear).



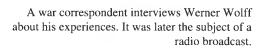
Heinz Schmidt, Fritz Karg and Fritz Thier (below) of the company headquarters of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie.



During the first days of August 1943, the vehicles of the Leibstandarte conducted a motor march through South Tyrol, where they were enthusiastically greeted by the German population. Here: a 3.7 cm antiaircraft gun of the Leibstandarte, whose crew is being entertained by South Tyrolian girls.



Peiper's battalion adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, received the Knight's Cross on 7 August 1943.







SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, Peiper's battalion adjutant.

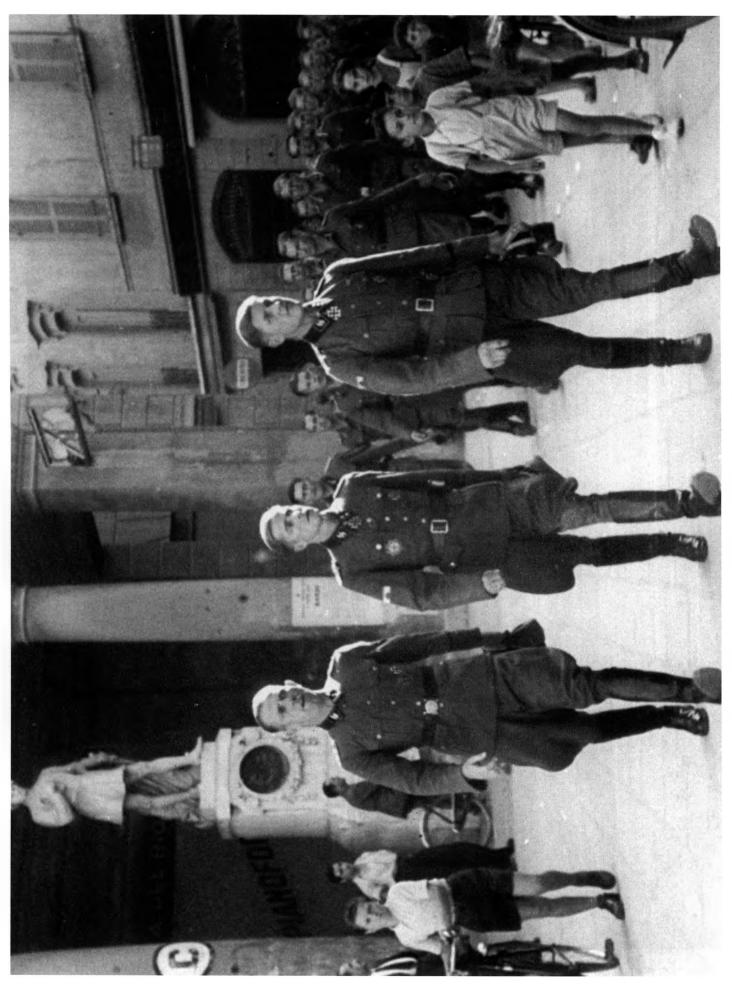


SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl (left) handed over his 11. (gep.) Kompanie to SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt for the period he was detached to attend a battalion commander's course.



The 13. (gep.) Kompanie during its march through Reggio. In the front: SS-Sturmmann Gert Quarthammer (KIA 1945).

In August 1943 the SPW-Bataillon marched singing through Reggio Emilia, with Jochen Peiper at its head, SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl (left) and SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff (right).





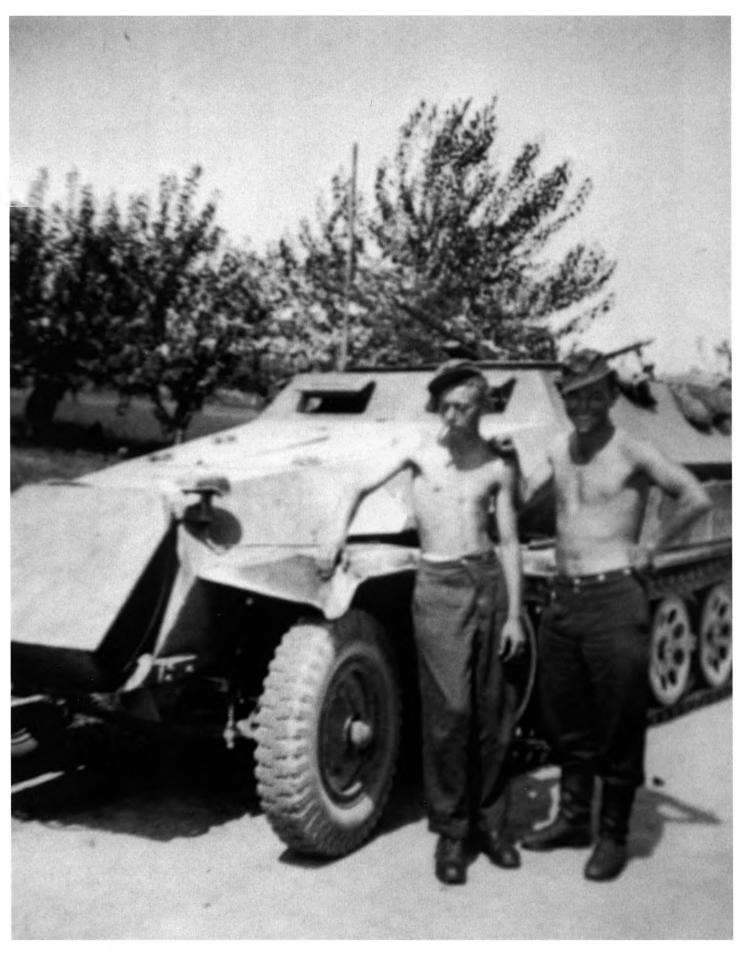
Jochen Peiper in Reggio Emilia in August 1943. His adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner, Werner Wolff, behind him.



The commander of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, on horseback. SS-Standartenoberjunker Heinrich Meyburg (left) and SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Sander (right).



Officers of the SPW-Bataillon as guests of the village priest in Inasia. From the left: SS-Untersturmführer Hans Mohnecke (signals officer), Erhard Gührs 13. (gep.) Kompanie), and SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt (11. (gep.) Kompanie) and SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Sander, (11. (gep.) Kompanie).



SPW of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie in Reggio Emilia in Italy in August 1943. Heinz Schmidt and Muhl in front.



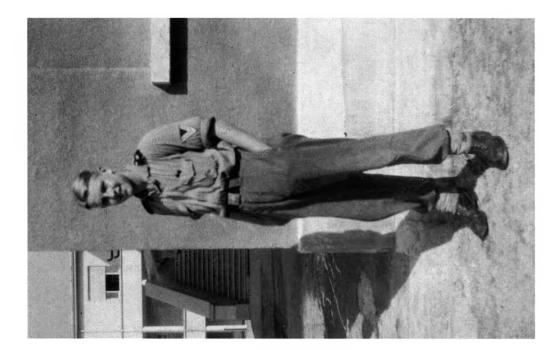
Men of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie eating pizza. From the right: Deutelhof, Karl Kick and Harry Krell.



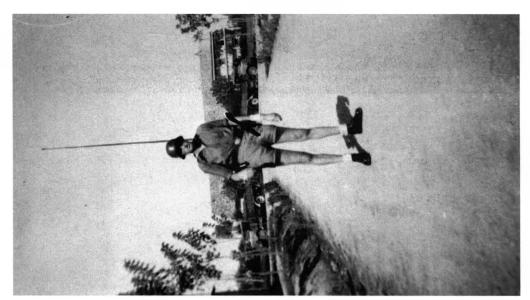
An SS-Unterscharführer of the SPW-Bataillon on traffic-control duty.



Hermann Dähne of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie in tropical uniform.



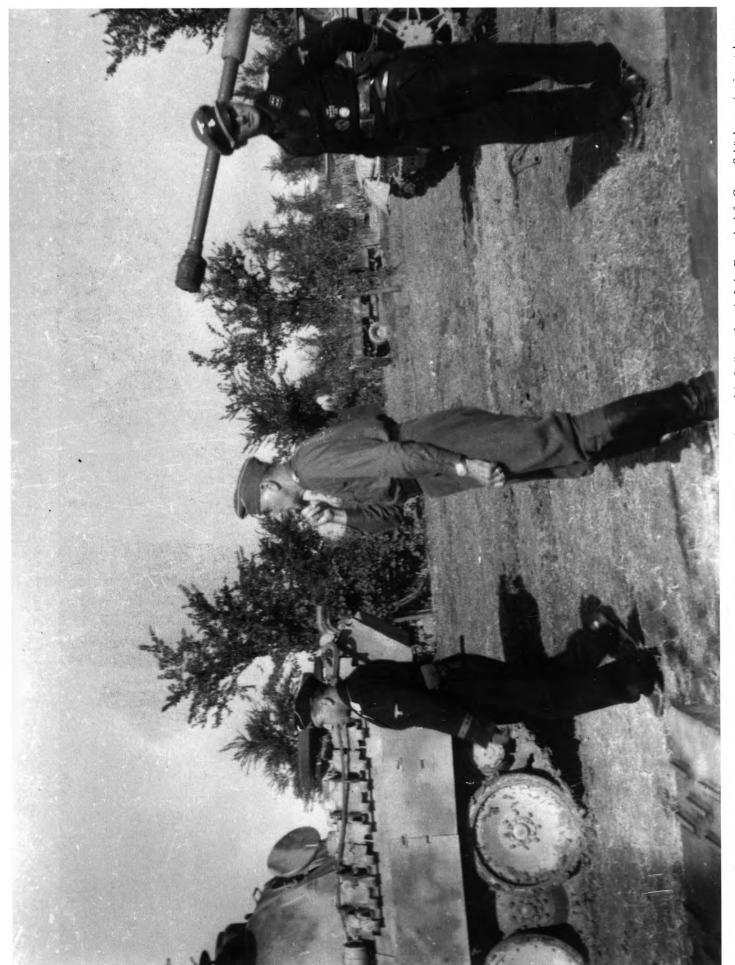
SS-Rotenführer Heini Glenewinkel, 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, killed in action on 9 August 1944 at St. Barthélemy as a SS-Unterscharführer.



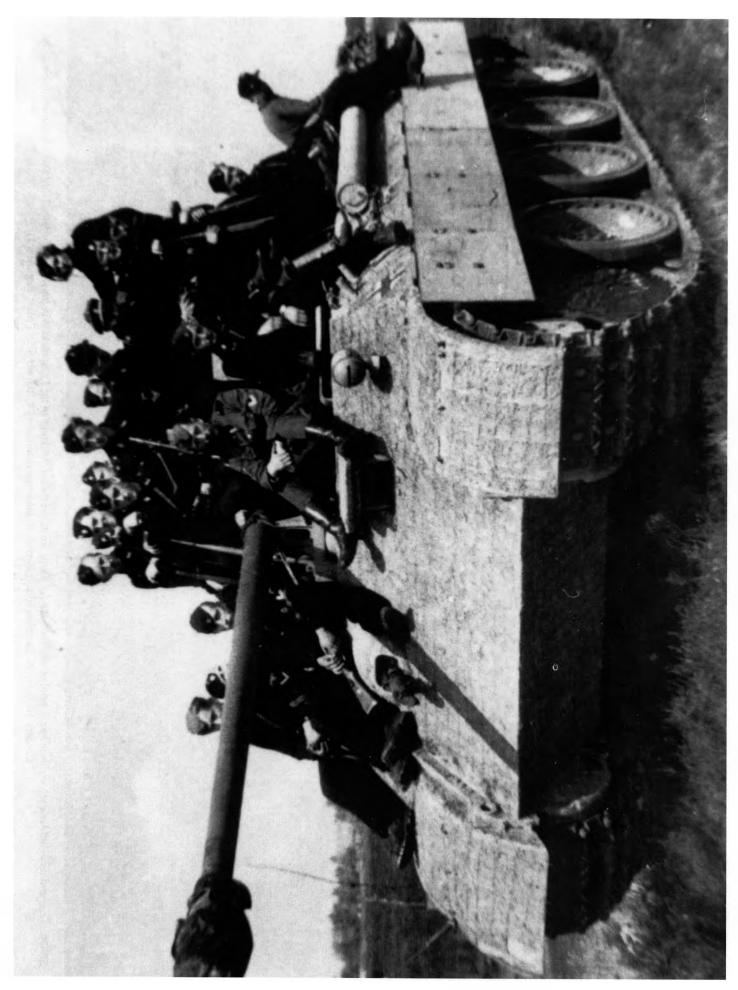
SS-Sturmmann Will Jäger of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie in the engineer motor pool at Mondovi.



The veteran Spieß of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Unterscharführer August Schirmag.



SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, commanding general of the II. SS-Panzer Korps, visits the Panzer Regiment of the Leibstandarte in Italy. From the left: Georg Schönberger (regimental commander) mander), Hausser, SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann (commander, I. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1).







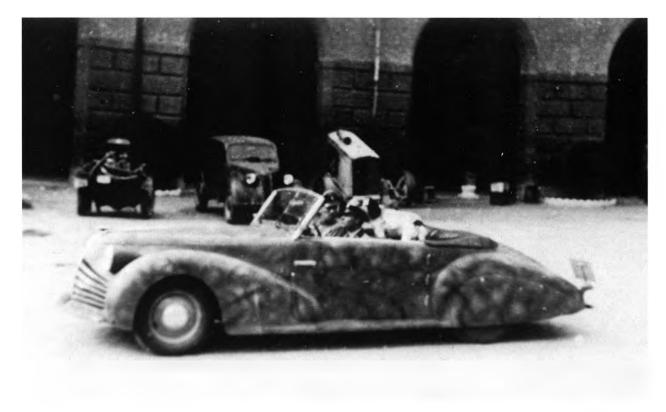


Panther S15", the command tank of the battalion commander of the I.(schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann (Photo taken at Regio, Italy).



Panzer IV "747" of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1; in the turret, SS-Unterscharführer Reinhold Giencke.

Panzer IV "626 "of the 6/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Milan, in the middle, SS-Unterscharführer Gerhard Arnold, to the right, Lenz (driver).



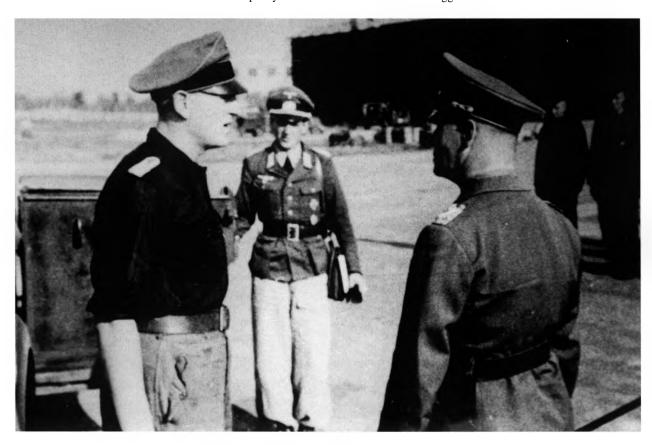
Jochen Peiper and Georg Preuß during the disarmament of the Italians in September, 1943. This picture was taken after Preuß had accepted the surrender of an Italian officer school through clever negotiation and without a fight.



SS-Hauptscharführer Fritz Böcker, Spieß of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, was temporarily assigned to the SS-Panzergrenadier School at Kienschlag along with several noncommissioned officers and enlisted personnel for purposes of the 11th War Reserve Junker Course.



The company commander of the 2. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Stübing, greets Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel in his capacity as the airfield commandant of Reggio.



Stübing conversing with the Generalfeldmarschall.



The regimental commander, Hugo Kraas, awards Nahkampfspangen on 1 September 1943.



The commander of the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas.

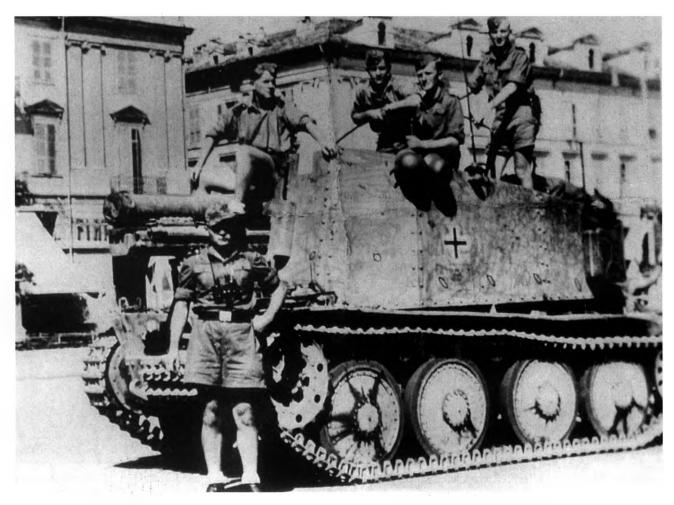
Tanks of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 on the Cathedral Square in Milan.



SPW of the 14. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 with 5 meter bridging girders. The name "panther" is painted on the right. Every SPW in this company had a name.



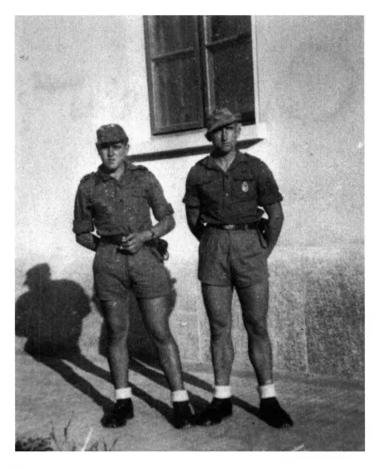
SS-Rottenführer Walter Kuhn of the 14. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 standing in front of his SPW "Falke" ("Falcon") with its bridging girders. While serving as the driver on 7 December 1943 at Chodory, he was hit and badly wounded. The SPW exploded.





A Grille of the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 at Cuneo. The gun commander, SS-Rottenführer Gerhard Kendzia, stands in front.

A Grille in Cuneo. Standing in front of it, SS-Sturmmann Kasper, loader.



Gutsche and Thier of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie in September 1943 at Cuneo.



Hermann Dähne and Jochen Molt, SS-Sturmmänner in the 13. (gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



Otto Geis and Leo Moser of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie.



SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt who commanded the 11. (gep.) Kompanie for Guhl in Italy.



Panzer III "053" of the headquarters company of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 at Parma.



A Panzer IV of the 5. Kompanie camouflaged in a vineyard.



One of the platoon headquarters vehicles of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie with a 3.7 cm antitank gun. SS-Sturmmann Fritz Schuster stands in front. He was killed in action on 21 November 1943.



SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse (left) and Peiper (with binoculars) observing in the direction of the Italian partisans at Boves.



Grillen in action against partisans in Italy. SS-Rottenführer Kindler's Grille is seen at the rear. It had two tank "kill" rings on its barrel stemming from the Kursk Offensive. The Grillen were in the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



Peiper in the fall of 1943 in Italy during a hunting excursion.



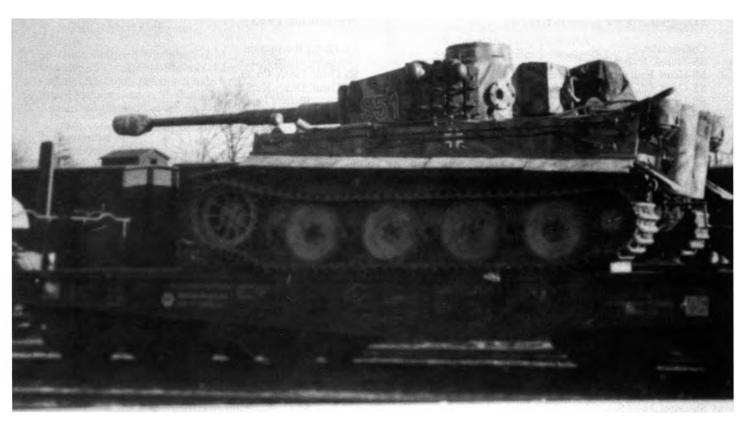
SPW with antitank rifle of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie. The "blow torch" insignia can be seen on the left.



The 11. (gep.) Kompanie loading up. SS-Unterscharführer August Schirmag, the first sergeant, in the middle.



At the fairgrounds in Nizza in the middle of October 1943. From left to right: SS-Unterscharführer Georg Freundt, SS-Unterscharführer August Schirmag (Spieß) and Max Rode.



Tiger "S51" of the 13. (schwere) SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 on a rail car. It was the tank belonging to the 5th platoon leader.



Panther being loaded up for Russia. The Volkswagen of the company commander of the 1. Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke, is parked in front. In addition to the tactical insignia on the standard, a Panther's head can be seen.

# The Third Time on the Eastern Front, 15 November 1943 to 1 February 1944

## III. (gep.)/SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2

Commander

SS-Stubaf. Jochen Peiper

SS-Hstuf. Paul Guhl (20 November to 6 December 1943)

SS-Ostuf. Otto Dinse (WIA: 2 January 1944)

SS-Ustuf, Heinz Tomhardt

SS-Ustuf. Dieter Kohler (in January 1944)

SS-Hstuf. Paul Guhl (effective 29 February 1944)

Adjutant

SS-Ustuf. Werner Wolff (WIA: 23 November 1943)

Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Walter Kern

Signals Officer

SS-Ustuf Hans Mahneke (KIA: 22 November 1943)

SS-St.O.Jk. Heinrich Meyburg

Surgeon

SS-Ostuf. Dr. Friedeich Breme Oberartzt Dr. Gustav Haarmann

Transportation Officer

SS-Ustuf Wilhelm Ratschko

Maintenance Officer

SS-Ustuf Günther Zastrow

Administration Officer

SS-Ustuf. Karl-Heinz Verwoort

SS-Ustuf. Ewald Ogertschnigg

Special Duties Officer: SS-Ustuf. Herbert Niemeyer

#### 11. (gep.) Kompanie Company Commanders

SS-Hstuf. Paul Guhl

SS-Ostuf. Hans Schmidt

(effective 20 November 1943; WIA: 2 January 1944)

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ustuf Gerhard Babick (WIA: 22 November 1943)

SS-Ustuf Heinz Sander (WIA: 7 January 1944)

SS-Hscha. Max Leike

### November 1943

12. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commanders

SS-Ostuf. Georg Preuß

SS-Ustuf. Dieter Kohler

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ustuf Dieter Kohler

SS-Hscha. Bruno Wessels (KIA: November 1943)

SS-Oscha. Karl Kaspari

SS-Oscha. Egmont Éichler

#### 13. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Officers

SS-Ustuf. Eduard Gührs (WIA: 21 December 1943)

SS-Ostuf. Rudolf Möhrlin

Platoon Leaders: SS-Ustuf. Heinz Tomhardt

SS-Ustuf. Walter Tafener (KIA: 29 November 1943)

SS-Oscha. Walter Braasch

SS-Hscha. Alfred Martin

#### 14. (s.gep.) Kompanie

Company Commanders SS-Ostuf. Otto Dinse

SS-Hscha. Jochen Thiele

Infantry Gun Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Bernd von Bergmann

SS-Ocha. Rudi Vieten

Combat Engineer Platoon Leader:

SS-Oscha. Wilhelm Haferstroh

Self-Propelled Antitank Platoon Leader

SS-Uscha. Helmut Feldvoß

# SS-Panzerregiment 1 LSSAH

Commander

SS-Stubaf. Jochen Peiper

(acting commander effective 30 January 1944)

SS-Stubaf. Herbert Kuhlmann

Adjutant

SS-Ustuf. Gerhard Nüske

SS-Ostuf. Wilhelm Rümmler

1st Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Arndt Fischer

2nd Orderly: SS-St.O.Jk. Kurt Köchlin

Signals Officer: SS-Ostuf. Helmut Jahn

HQ Company Commander: SS-Stubaf. Simon Fuß

Surgeon: SS-Stubaf. Dr. Gerhard Peters

Transportation Officer: SS-Hstuf. Erich Strohschön Administrative Officers: SS-Hstuf. Richard Zimmermann

SS-Ustuf. Kurt Christke

Maintenance Officer: SS-Ustuf. Anton Stark

Special Duties Officers: SS-Ustuf. Christel Amberger

SS-Ustuf. Karl Dietrich

SS-Ustuf. Günter Stark

SS-Ostuf, Wilhelm Rümmler

1st Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Arndt Fischer

2nd Orderly: SS-St.O.Jk. Kurt Köchlin

Signals Officer: SS-Ostuf. Helmut Jahn

As of 20 November 1943 14. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

SS-Ostuf. Erich Rumpf

SS-Ustuf. Günter Leither

SS-Ustuf. Herbert Gauglitz

SS-Oscha, Walter Böhm

SS-Oscha. Otto Hoffmann

# Panzer-Werkstattkompanie/SS-Panzerregiment 1

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Wilhelm Kluge

Senior Ordnance Officer:

SS-Ostuf. Erwin Bacher

Shop Foreman, Maintenance Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Werner Stöckel

13. (s.)/SS-Panzerregiment 1

Company Commanders:

SS-Hstuf. Heinz Kling

SS-Ustuf. Michael Wittmann (effective 14 December 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Helmut Wendorff (effective February 1944)

Platoon Leaders: SS-Ustuf. Helmut Wendorff

SS-Ustuf. Michael Wittmann

SS-Ustuf. Eduard Kalinowsky

SS-Ustuf. Walter Hahn SS-Ustuf. Fritz Hartel (KIA: 27 Dec.1943)

SS-Ostuf. Horst Rempel (eff. Feb. 1944)

# Kraftfahrkompanie / SS-Panzerregiment 1

SS-Ustuf. Karl Petersen

# I. (s.)/SS-Panzerregiment 1

Commander

SS-Stubaf. Herbert Kuhlmann

Adjutant

SS-Ustuf. Gottfried Winterhoff (KIA: 27 January 1944)

Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Otto Bucholz (KIA: 27 November 1943)

Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Joachim Sünderhauff

Signal Platoon Leader: SS-Ostuf. Helmut Pönisch

Antiaircraft Platoon Leader: SS-Ustuf. Hans Hennecke

#### 1. Kompanie

Commander:

SS-Hstuf. Werner Poetschke

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Heinz Meier (KIA: 20 Nov. 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Hans Müller

SS-Ustuf. Karl Heinz Fernau

SS-Oscha. Rudolf Scheel

## 3. Kompanie

Commanders:

SS-Ostuf. Kurt Kleist (KIA: 6 December 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Joachim Sünderhauff

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Friedl Tibcke (KIA: 6 December 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Joachim Sünderhauff

SS-Oscha. Karl Joose

SS-Oscha. Karl Raquet

### As of 20 November 1943

HQ Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Hans Gruhle

Reconnaissance Platoon Leader: SS-Hscha. Konrad Heubeck

Surgeon: SS-Hstuf. Dr. Heinz Pötschlak

SS-St.O.Jk. Helmut Schneider (KIA: 19 Dec. 1943)

SS-Ostuf. Dr. Rolf Jergus

Maintenance Officers:

SS-Ustuf. Horst Gülden

SS-Ustuf. Otto Ibenthal

Transportation Officer: SS-Hstuf. Erich Strohschön

#### 2. Kompanie

Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Hans Stübing (WIA: 7 December 1943)

SS-Ostuf. Hans Malkomes

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Gerd Jahn

SS-Ustuf. Jupp Bosbach

SS-Hscha. Hubert Kaufmann

SS-Oscha. Heinz Knappich

#### 4. Kompanie

Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Ernst Otto

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Georg Berger (KIA: 18 November 1943)

SS-Ustuf Hans Hennecke

SS-Ustuf. Fritz Eggers (WIA: 21 November 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Hubert Schönfellner (KIA: 29 Dec. 1943)

# II./SS-Panzerregiment 1

Commander

SS-Stubaf. Martin Groß

SS-Hstuf. Heinz Kling (effective 14 December 1943)

Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Dr. Gustav Richert

Signals Platoon Leader:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Zimmermann (KIA: 11 December 1943) SS-Ustuf. Horst Beckmann (KIA: 21 December 1943)

Antiaircraft Platoon Leader: SS-Ustuf. Hans Hennecke

# 5. Kompanie

Commanders:

SS-Ostuf. Gerhard Scharke (KIA: 8 December 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Helmut Schäfer (WIA: 30 December 1944)

SS-Ostuf. Fritz Streipart

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Zimmermann

SS-Oscha. Paul Blohm

SS-Ustuf. Karl Ludwig

SS-Hscha. Heinz Mohrmann

## 7. Kompanie

Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Herbert Sprunk (KIA: 8 December 1943)

Platoon Leaders

SS-Ostuf. Wilhelm Rümmler (KIA: 23 Nov. 1943)

SS-Ostuf. Kurt Hoffmann

SS-Ustuf. Hans-Joachim Witte

SS-Oscha. Hans Siptrott

# As of 20 November 1943

HQ Company Commander:

SS-Hstuf. Konrad Unger

Motorcycle Reconnaissance Platoon Leader: (Terrain)

SS-Ustuf. Herbert Gauglitz

Surgeon:

SS-Ustuf. Dr. Alexander von Guelfenburg (WIA: 23 Dec/43)

SS-Ostuf. Dr. Albert Schmidbauer

Maintenance Officer:

SS-Ostuf. Willi Gründemann

Assistant Maintenance Officer:

SS-Ustuf. Otto Scherer

Administrative Office:

SS-Ustuf. Artur Mößle

#### 6. Kompanie

Commanders:

SS-Ostuf. Walter Malchow (WIA: 22 December 1943)

SS-Hscha. Michael Meschnarz

SS-Ostuf. Benoni Junker

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Rattenhuber

SS-Ustuf. Helmut Schäfer

SS-Ustuf. Walter Blank (KIA: 22 December 1943

#### 8. Kompanie

Commanders:

SS-Ostuf. Sepp Armberger (WIA: 18 November 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Werner Sternebeck

SS-Ostuf. Roland Michalski (KIA: 20 December 1943)

SS-Ostuf. Sepp Armberger (effective February 1944)

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Oscha. FA Joachim Fabig (KIA: 14 Dec. 1943)

SS-Ustuf. Wolfgang Wagner (KIA: 21 Dec. 1943)

Army Group South had to react immediately so that its threatened north wing would not be cut off and destroyed. The 1. SS-Panzer-Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler and the Army's 1. Panzer-Division were assigned to stabilize the situation on the Army Group's north wing. The Leibstandarte's units had already had to drive back heavy attacks by the advancing Soviets while offloading. The 9. (MG)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 detrained in Koshanka on 7 November 1943 and shortly afterwards was involved in heavy, costly fighting. SS-Panzer Grenadier Hans Jürgen, who was 18 years old at the time, described the start of the fighting on 8 November 1943:

When it began to grow light in the east, the Tigers of the 25. Panzer-Division had joined us as well; there were just three of them left. We didn't know if the remaining two had been destroyed in action or if they had just been left behind for lack of fuel. The tanks took up ready positions in the center of the town in front of the railroad station. We were tired but already dug in. The tension we were under was too great to sleep, as we could already hear engine noise far to the east, growing louder as it approached. It slowly grew lighter. We could recognize a stretch of woods which crossed the path from east to west about 200 meters in front of our position.

The sky was cloud covered and it began to drizzle. A small rise in temperature caused thick ground fog. Visibility was only about 200 meters. Like a giant swarm of bees, the continuous roaring noise of tank engines at full throttle came all around us – a great, confidence-building noise! But only if they were our tanks! And these could only be Russian tanks! Estimating from the engine noise, they were approaching in monstrous numbers! If only that damned fog didn't keep us from seeing!

Suddenly an individual T-34 emerged from the fog, coming from the east. It stopped in the open field to the left of our machine gun position and observed. We ducked down. This was not the time to be seen! That had to be an easy target for our Tigers, but they weren't doing anything. Our machine gun commander took a short hop back out of our hole and yelled to me: "Let's go! We'll get it!"

We planned the best way to get to the enemy tank which just sat there observing. Here's how we would do it: leave the foxhole crawling to the rear until we reached the rear of the Russian hut. Helmet and gas mask were left behind in our position. Raymond carried his submachine gun to give me cover. I only had my pistol loose in my pocket and a hollow charge grenade in my left hand. With a single movement we ran into the shallow ditch left of the field path. We crawled some 180 meters forward, staying low and close to the low bushes. Raymond covering up front, me behind and watching the tank at regular intervals. It was still at the same spot!

My pulse pounded, nerves stretched to the breaking point ... Then we were even with the T-34, with the woods only about 20 meters ahead of us. The tank was to our left at a distance of about 40-50 meters in the open field and was observing in the direction of the village. We didn't like the woods in front of us. I decided to crawl directly towards the tank, using the cover of a deep furrow in the field. Sliding, pressed tightly against the ground, I moved forward without raising my head. Judging from the idling engine noise in front of me, I attempted to estimate my distance to it. I had to be in dead ground, and I removed the safety cap from the activation mechanism. I jumped up – in a

few leaps I was at the tank – pulled the ignition string with a short jerk and placed the charge above the track on the side of the tank.

A jump away from the tank and back into full cover ... seven seconds could be an eternity! Suddenly there was a hiss right next to me. A pineapple grenade with gray smoke coming from its fuse. A grab – I had to get rid of it! As I threw it, I raised my head and saw a Russian jump from the tank and run off. Back under cover. Then two explosions, one after the other. First the hollow charge and then the hand grenade. Smoke poured out of the tank. I raced back to the field road. Raymond, relieved, shook my hand. Then quickly back to our position. We had done it!

We were sitting in the hut. The old woman had brought us a glass of milk and pickles. I was still shaking all over. It took a while to get over the tension. Then a report to the company command post. Our company commander had followed the whole thing through his binoculars. He was grumpy, and grumbled about recklessness which was generally only awarded with wooden crosses, saying that the company gets little help from dead men. But then hand shakes, congratulations, a clap on the shoulder, and back into position. \(^1\)

The staff and the 11. and 12. Kompanien of Peiper's battalion still hadn't reached the Eastern Front by 14 November 1943. The 13. (gep.) Kompanie went directly into combat as it came off the train. On 15 November 1943 the Leibstandarte attacked to the north towards the Kiev-Shitomir Rollbahn with the 1. Panzer-Division on its left. Its right flank was covered by the 25. Panzer-Division and the 2. SS-Panzer-Division "Das Reich". SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 took Solowjewka by 1345 hours and Wodoty by 1725 hours.

During the attack on Solowjewka, SS-Hauptscharführer Konrad Heubeck won special distinction for himself and his "Panther" Platoon. He broke into the village at the head of the I. Bataillon of the Panzer regiment which had wheeled and attacked from the north. He broke up the Russian defense and considerably reduced resistance in the village facing the grenadier units attacking from the west and northwest. The 2. Panzer-Kompanie under SS-Obersturmführer Hans Stübing outflanked the enemy and destroyed 12 T-34's, a T-70, 10 antitank guns and a Stalin Organ. Stübing himself destroyed four of these T-34's and the T-70.3 Altogether, 24 T-34's and eight assault guns were destroyed.4

Elements of Peiper's SPW-Bataillon arrived on this day and units were attached to SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse's 14. Kompanie, making it Kampfgruppe Dinse. On 16 November SS-Panzeraufklärungs-Abteilung 1 took Turbowka and Diwin. Wilnja was taken by SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1. Kampfgruppe Dinse was able to repulse an enemy penetration in Lissowka and Moschorino.<sup>5</sup>

On 17 November the SPW-Bataillon – with Dinse's 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie reinforced by ten Tigers from the 13. Panzer-Kompanie under SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling and a platoon of combat engineers – moved out of Turbowka to reconnoiter Lutschin. They took Lutschin at 1540 hours after an engagement lasting an hour and a half, destroying five T-34's. That night, at Lutschin, the Kampfgruppe beat back an attack in battalion strength from Federowka.

On 19 November 1943, at 1135 hours, a strong enemy attack

struck Kampfgruppe Dinse and pushed it back into the western section of Lutschin. When an attack in regimental strength hit the village, the II./2. Regiment was shifted to Lisowka as a reserve since the enemy was attempting to bypass Lutschin to the north and thus threatening the division's flank. The II./Panzer-Regiment 1, together with the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, advanced on Morosowka. SS-Obersturmbannführer Frey's reinforced SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 fought an all-round defense at Kotscherowo and blocked the Kiev-Shitomir road to the enemy. During these two days Kampfgruppe Dinse/Kling destroyed 13 T-34's, 25 antitank guns, a 12.7 cm howitzer and several antitank rifles, trucks and prime movers.<sup>6</sup> Other elements of Dinse's company were in close combat on Hill 176.9.

During the night of 19 November 1943, after the relief of its units in Kornin, Lutschin and Diwin had been completed, the Leibstandarte was ordered to attack Brusilow from the line Morosowka–Wodoty. At 1530 hours on 19 November 1943 Jochen Peiper reported that the remaining elements of his battalion had assembled in Biala Zerkow. At 0100 hours during the night of 20 November 1943 the reinforced SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 attacked with the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 on both sides of the Wodoty–Brusilow road.

At 0305 hours the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 encountered stubborn resistance in enemy positions at point 185.6, three kilometers southwest of Brusilow. After the battalion had fought its way through two more enemy positions to within 1.5 kilometers southwest of Brusilow, it was stopped by a tank ditch running through a woods. A flanking maneuver to the east bogged down in the swamp and artillery fire. The "Panther"-Bataillon reached Pilponka-Priworotje, and SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 was ordered there as well. The attack on Brusilow was called off.

SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class to the worthy company medic of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Unterscharführer Rudi Jentzsch, and SS-Sturmmann Toni Motzheim in the engineer platoon of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie. He also awarded the Iron Cross, 2nd Class to 17 men.<sup>8</sup>

# **Peiper Takes Over the Panzer-Regiment**

At noon on 20 November 1943 the commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Obersturmbannführer Schönberger, was killed in action at Solowjewka by artillery shrapnel while outside his tank. The divisional commander, SS-Oberführer Wisch, gave command of the regiment to Jochen Peiper. For Peiper this was a major new assignment. It meant that he would have to demonstrate his ability to command a regiment.

Peiper would not normally have been expected to take over command of the armor regiment, as he was not a tanker and had never commanded a company or battalion in the regiment. He had never occupied a position on its staff. He had never taken the battalion commander's course at the armor school, let alone the course for regimental commanders for this branch. The command of a fully-equipped armor regiment with ten line companies was a completely new type of assignment for Peiper. He had previously commanded his SPW-Bataillon with tremendous success and, of course, during that time had worked in cooperation with tank units. He realized that he had been named to the command of the Panzer regiment because of his reputation in

the division for aggressiveness. However, this meant a considerable change in tactical leadership, and it gave him even greater responsibilities. Was he up to it? Before we continue to describe the fighting, Peiper's new organization should be described first. He himself had little time to get acquainted with it.

In November 1943 SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 had two battalions. The first battalion had been commanded by SS-Sturmbannfnhrer Herbert Kuhlmann since June 1943, and Peiper already knew him from the Junker School at Braunschweig. This battalion had been reorganized in the summer of 1943 in Mailly-le-Camp and Grafenwöhr. In Grafenwöhr it had been re-equipped with the new "Panther". A very small percentage of the personnel came from the original I. Abteilung, which had formed the cadre for the "Hitlerjugend"-Division. Personnel also came from SS-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1 and the SS-Panzer-Ersatz-Regiment. The new I. Abteilung had nothing in common with the earlier one of SS-Sturmbannführer Wisch. The commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann, had previously commanded a rifle company in the "Nordland"-Regiment and a company in SS-Panzer-Regiment "Das Reich". After training with the new tanks at Grafenwöhr, the "Panther"-Bataillon arrived at the Leibstandarte in Italy on 10 August 1943.

Not only the battalion commander but also the company commanders of the I. Abteilung were new to the Panzer regiment. The 1. Kompanie was led by SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, who had previously commanded the Aufklärungs-Abteilung "Das Reich" and been awarded the German Cross in Gold. The 2. Kompanie was commanded by SS-Obersturmfnhrer Hans Stübing, who came from the Leibstandarte's former Sturmgeschütz-Batterie. SS-Hauptsturmfnhrer Kurt Kleist was commander of the 3. Kompanie. The 37-year-old Kleist also came from the Sturmgeschütz-Batterie. SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto from the Sudetenland commanded the 4. Kompanie. He had previously been in the "Das Reich" Division.

Each company of the I. Abteilung consisted of four platoons with five Panthers each, as well as one tank each for the commander and the headquarters section leader. In all, each of the four companies had 22 Panthers. In addition, the Headquarters Company had a combat reconnaissance platoon consisting of five Panthers and the flak platoon commanded by SS-Untersturmfnhrer Hennecke. In the Leibstandarte the "Panther"-Bataillon was officially designated the I.(schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, in contrast to the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 which was called a "medium" unit.

The II. (m.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was commanded by SS-Sturmbannführer Martin Groß. Groß, who came from Frankfurt, had been a member of the Leibstandarte since 1933. He had commanded the II. Abteilung since the fall of 1942. For his leadership of the battalion he had been awarded the German Cross in Gold in March 1943 and the Knight's Cross in July 1943.

The 5. Kompanie was commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Scharke. The 6. Kompanie was commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Walter Malchow, who had received the German Cross in Gold after "Citadel". SS-Obersturmführer Herbert Sprunk commanded the 7. Kompanie and the 8. Kompanie, which didn't complete its organization until Italy,

was commanded by SS-Untersturmführer Werner Sternebeck (for the wounded SS-Obersturmführer Sepp Armberger). SS-Sturmbannführer Groß had four tank companies which were equipped with 22 Panzer IV's each.

In addition, Peiper had two more companies at his disposal which belonged to neither of the two battalions, but were regimental units. The 13. (schwere) Kompanie was the "Tiger" Kompanie. It was organized in Italy with five platoons of five Tigers each giving a total of 27 Tigers. This imposing strength had nothing to do with preferential treatment for equipping the Leibstandarte, but may be explained by the activation of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 for the I. SS-Panzer-Korps which had begun in the summer of 1943.

When it became known in October 1943 that the Leibstandarte would be transferred from Italy back to the Eastern Front, the rump of the battalion with all 27 Tigers was formed into an overstrength company and given the former designation of 13. (schwere) Kompanie. It was under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling, who had commanded "Tiger" Kompanie of the LAH since its inception. The remaining tank personnel, as well as the Headquarters Company and the Repair Company, had been transferred to Sennelager-Augustdorf for additional activation.

There was also the 14. (Pionier)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Erich Rumpf, which was equipped with SPW. It carried bridging equipment with it (duckboard trackway) and was partially equipped with flamethrowers. The regiment also possessed its headquarters company, the armor repair company, and the motor transport company.

The regimental adjutant was SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Nüske, who came from the Leibstandarte's Pionier-Bataillon, and who had commanded the regiment's Pionier-Kompanie in 1943. He had been decorated with the Iron Cross, 1st Class, the Close Combat Badge and the Crimean Shield. Because Nüske wasn't present during the period that Peiper took over the regiment, his duties were carried out by the 1st Orderly Officer, SS-Obersturmführer Rümmler. The signals officer was SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn, and the orderly officers were SS-Obersturmführer Wilhelm Rümmler, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer and, later, SS-Standartenoberjunker Kurt Köchlin. Peiper had a total nominal strength of 214 armored vehicles at his disposal.

The departure from his SPW-Bataillon weighed heavily on Peiper; he had commanded the battalion for more than a year. He had reorganized it from an infantry battalion to an armored infantry battalion, and accomplished extraordinary things with it on the Eastern Front. Peiper wrote: "I regarded the III. Bataillon – with its organization, its exploits, and its special élan – as the high point and fulfillment of my military career, and I felt that I would always have a special bond with it, more than with any other unit". Since Peiper, as commander of the Panzer regiment, would simultaneously command the division's Panzergruppe, the SPW-Bataillon would continue to be under his tactical command. Officially, he gave command of the battalion to his old comrade SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl, the commander of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, who had taken a battalion commander's course in the fall of 1943.<sup>2</sup>

During the night of 20 to 21 November Peiper went to Ssolowjewka and took command of the Panzer regiment. His regimental command post was located in a school-like building at a fork in the road opposite the church. Because the regiment was in action, the new commander saw only a few men that evening. Among them was a private from the main radio post, who had to deliver a radio message and had trouble waking up the sleeping Peiper.<sup>3</sup>

Peiper's assumption of command of the Panzer regiment was regarded with mixed feelings by many in the regiment, as he had too much of a reputation as an aggressive daredevil for many of the tankers. Initially, rumor had selected SS-Sturmbannführer Martin Groß, commander of the II. Abteilung, as the future regimental commander. But when Peiper appeared, the two orderly officers determined they no longer wanted to remain on the staff "with the infantryman". One of the two was SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer who recalled Peiper's assumption of duty:

Peiper entered the room, identified himself, and said that, effective immediately, he was in command of the Panzer regiment. We – the adjutant and I – had heard about this just prior to his arrival, since the divisional command post was in the same village, and we were united in our desire to report back to combat duty. The adjutant asked the new commander for a transfer. Peiper didn't consider it very long when he approved the request. When I made the same request, he informed me very abruptly that I was to remain there.<sup>4</sup>

Fischer became Peiper's 1st orderly officer and Rümmler, who had asked for the transfer, and who had previously been the 1st orderly officer before becoming the temporary adjutant, took over a platoon in the 7. Panzer-Kompanie. In a conversation with the staff officers, even the returning regimental adjutant, SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Nüske, expressed reservations as to whether Peiper was a suitable commander, strictly from the point of view of armor tactics.<sup>5</sup> Peiper accepted his predecessor's entire staff and brought no officer of the SPW-Bataillon along with him.

In the Fall of 1943 the Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment did not enjoy the best of reputation among the division's Panzergrenadier regiments, because of the leadership practices of its commander, Schönberger. The aggressiveness of the company commanders and the tank commanders suffered too much under the restrictions of their commander, who would have much preferred that no tank be damaged, let alone destroyed in action. Those leaders who reported lost tanks were usually reprimanded.6 As a result, the commanders of the Panzergrenadiere preferred to work with the assault gun battalion.7 The division's Panzergrenadier commanders eagerly waited for Peiper's first operation. Peiper had no time to get acquainted with his regiment. However, some of the tankers of the II. Abteilung remember that he made a brief appearance in front of assembled elements of the battalion, in a leather coat with the collar turned up, spoke a few words and introduced himself as the new regimental commander. He left a good impression behind him, and they had the feeling that they had gotten an aggressive commander.8

On 21 November 1943 SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 attacked Brusilow from the south, but was met by heavy enemy fire, which halted the attack about noon. Several attacks on Oserjany by SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, reinforced with tanks and assault guns, were also unable to break through. At 1500 hours the SPW-Bataillon arrived at Ssolowjewka from

Kastin. SS-Untersturmführer Michael Wittmann of the 13. (schwere) Panzer-Kompanie destroyed 13 tanks and seven antitank guns, an action which SS-War Reporter Herbert Reinecker described as follows:

At Brusilow, Wittmann ran into a Soviet tank position, attacked it, and was faster, smarter, and braver and destroyed ten out of the herd of Soviet tanks. On that same afternoon, three more fell prey to him ... He counted every tank, but he estimated that the antitank guns he destroyed were worth twice as much. He hated the hidden nests, these refuges of death, and took particular pleasure in sniffing them out. He said that enemy tanks no longer make him nervous, and that for him, only the antitank guns, hiding in their lairs, were still really unpleasant, as they were much harder to eliminate.9

How did the crew of the commander's tank get on with its new regimental commander, Jochen Peiper? The radioman, SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl, recalled:

From January 1943 to the recapture of Kharkov, I had been assigned to regimental commander Schönberger's armored car as the leader of the signals section. Then, when we went into action at Belgorod, I took over the regimental signals section, a position I continued to hold during our return to action in Russia until the middle of November 1943. Since I could not get a transfer to a tank in spite of repeated requests, I requested a radio technical sergeant's course at the signals school in Metz. As a result, Unterscharführer Hans Frings took over the radio post, and I went on several attacks in staff tank 055 as radio operator with the commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 LSSAH, Georg Schönberger.

After Schönberger's death it was understood that one of the battalion commanders would be his successor, however, the news then trickled in that Sturmbannführer Joachim Peiper was taking over the regiment. Up until then, Peiper had been commander of a Panzergrenadier battalion — which we simply called the "Blowtorch Battalion". We knew his reputation for keen and decisive aggressiveness and so, at least among us noncommissioned officers, there was a certain amount of skepticism, because we didn't see how a man devoted to surprise hussar tactics, which might be possible for the rapid SPW, would be able to tactically command a Panzer regiment.

Peiper showed up and shortly after his arrival we experienced our first operation under his command. When we went into our ready positions early in the morning, the signals officer, Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn, was already in the tank. We were surprised by a low-level attack by a Russian fighter-bomber, which forced us to leave the tank. After getting back into the tank, our vehicle had to negotiate a deep ditch and, while attempting to turn, we broke the right differential. The tank was unable to maneuver and had to go back for repairs. <sup>10</sup>

This happened on 22 November 1943 when Peiper led the Panzer regiment into battle for the first time. He had to transfer to another tank. On this day the division had been assigned to send the southern group – SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 – to advance through Diwin, Ulschka, and Jastrebenka and, after taking those places, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was to attack Brusilow from the east and hold it. The northern group – SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 – attacked Brusilow-West, proceeding right of Oserjany. The 1. Panzer-Division was launched at Brusilow from the north. 11

At 0430 hours on 22 November 1943 Peiper reported that his II. Abteilung had to recover the tanks which had broken down south of Brusilow on the preceding day and would not be ready to attack before 1400 hours. At 0555 hours SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas' SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 attacked Jastrebenka from Ulschka. SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Becker's I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was the lead battalion, SS-Sturmbannführer Rudi Sandigs' II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was deployed behind and to its right. They were supported by 11 Tigers and the 3. and 7. Artillerie-Batterien. The III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 remained initially in Diwin as a reserve until Jastrebenka was taken, and then moved there. SS-Untersturmfnhrer Walter Hahn's Tiger ran onto a mine at Ulschka and was rendered immobile. Shortly after, the tank took an artillery hit which killed SS-Schütze Ernst Braun. Strong Soviet forces had set up a defense in Jastrebenka and placed the attacking elements of the Leibstandarte under concentrated fire from numerous weapons, so that the attack bogged down at 1005 hours in defensive enemy fire. The two battalions dug in 1.5 km south of the village.

At 1130 hours 25 Panzer IV's of the II. Abteilung were assembled in Diwin. The tanks and the SPW-Bataillon were attached to SS-Obersturmbannführer Kraas, who resumed the attack at 1304 hours with this Kampfgruppe. The attack succeeded against stubborn Russian resistance, which defended on both flanks and to the rear and used tanks camouflaged in haystacks. At 1450 hours the battle began for the southern edge of Jastrebenka where strong Russian antitank gun and artillery elements were firing from well constructed field positions. Casualties mounted. The gunner in SS-Unterscharführer Hans Höld's Tiger, Rolf Schamp, recalled:

We mounted the tank and Höld ordered: "Panzer marsch!" ... We climbed the slope with the tank, and then the tank tilted forward over the ridge. We continued for a few meters and then the small woods became a sea of flame. We were hit! There was a flash as when fireworks go off. There was a rushing noise up above me in the tank, then it was still. It smelled of ozone and the driver yelled: "My collarbone is sticking out!" I myself was bleeding from the forehead and I turned around. Höld was sitting there, bent forward ... He had two bubbles at his nostrils. Höld said nothing. There was something between his eyebrows that looked like a needle. There was a rustling again. My first reaction was to quickly tell the driver: "Back-up!" The tank still moved. We went back down the slope, and I looked at Höld. He was dead.\(^{12}\)

A shell had hit the Tiger on the cupola. The gun on SS-Untersturmführer Kalithensky's Tiger was bent by a hit.<sup>13</sup> The 13. "Tiger" Kompanie, moving in the first wave, eliminated the flanking forces and rolled over the antitank strongpoint south of Jastrebenka. <sup>14</sup> The following was written about the SPW-Bataillon:

When the SPW-Bataillon reached the south edge of Jastrebenka at 1400 hours, about an hour after moving out of Ulschka, the tanks stopped at the edge of the village to attack the Pakfront by fire. On his own initiative, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, at the head of his battalion, maneuvered far to the right and left and managed to bypass the Pakfront with his SPW-Bataillon and, breaking into the village by surprise, wiped out a

large part of the enemy forces in the village, clearing it.15

Guhl's signals officer, SS-Untersturmführer Hans Mahneke, was killed. At 1615 hours the grenadiers of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2 pushed into the village and, at 1800 hours, after stubborn house-to-house fighting, Kraas could report that the village had been captured. This first major attack as commander of the Panzer regiment and of the Panzergruppe is typical of Peiper's leadership in which the SPW-Bataillon often played a conspicuous role. The commander of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, wrote:

Peiper's transfer to the Panzer regiment was no problem for us and, in some respects, we remained "his" battalion. Because the Panzer regiment hadn't gotten in the right frame of mind for his frequently dashing leadership style, it gave him pleasure to use "his battalion" to demonstrate to the tanks how it was done. I remember when he told me right at the beginning: "Get the battalion, we'll show them how to do it!"16 In the final analysis, it was the SPW-Bataillon put into action by Peiper, which brought success to this attack which had initially bogged down. The way the battalion made its assault, bypassing frontal resistance on both sides, and then breaking into the village at top speed, firing with every gun it had, had been used successfully by Peiper ever since Kharkov. He wrote: "The SPW-Bataillon liked to attack the Russian villages like a cavalry unit would have done: at high speed from a variety of directions and firing from everything it had.17

The new battalion commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl, had also mastered these tactics. Although Paul Guhl had not been the most popular commander of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, he led the battalion with impulsive dash and energy. During combat the dynamic officer from Stuttgart was always to be found in the lead SPW, risking his life there and in close combat. Peiper called Guhl, who was one year younger, "Baby". When both men first met in the Leibstandarte's 11. Kompanie in 1936, Guhl was one of the youngest and smallest officers. In the SPW-Bataillon, Guhl could always be sure of Peiper's support. In the SPW-Bataillon, Guhl could always be sure of Peiper's support.

The commanders of the 11., 12., 13., and 14. (gep.) Kompanien of the SPW-Bataillon were SS-Obersturmführer Schmidt, SS-Obersturmführer Preuß, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs and SS-Obersturmführer Dinse, respectively. Hans Schmidt, a 31-year-old officer from the Saarland, was known as a calm, self-confident commander. The 23-year old Georg Preuß from Danzig - nicknamed Maschenpreuß ("Chainmail Preuß") in the battalion - was a daring, risk-taking commander whose cheeky ways were familiar to everyone. Gührs, 23-years old and from Hamburg, had commanded the 13. Kompanie since July 1943. The 31-year-old SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, who had been Peiper's adjutant in Kharkov, commanded the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie. SS-Untersturmführer and Knight's Cross recipient Werner Wolff was the battalion adjutant. Except for Schmidt, all the commanders had the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Close Combat Badge in Bronze.21

SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 under SS-Obersturmbannführer Albert Frey bogged down in heavy enemy fire in front of the south edge of Oserjany on 22 November 1943 and received orders to disengage and move to the area east of Ssolowjewka by way of Pilipowka and Semethenka. An attack to the northwest on Lasarowka was ordered for 23 November 1943 to cover the eastern and northern flanks of the division from Ulschka to Jastrebenka. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 (reinforced) was launched in an attack. At 0010 hours the enemy felt his way toward the western outskirts of Jastrebenka and was pushed back by the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Obersturmführer Dinse. At 0600 hours the II. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was attacked by tanks from Starizja at the north edge of Jastrebenka, but was able to retain control of the situation and destroy one T-34 tank.

The SPW-Bataillon Adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff, was badly wounded by a rifle bullet through the right upper thigh: "This time, the Soviets really got me ... It was on 23 November and I lived through a couple of dark hours. Then there were days where I wrestled with fate, because they wanted to amputate my right leg. But now everything's OK. They didn't have to do it, and I really do owe a lot to fate." The impulsive Wolff avoided the threat of amputation by pulling his pistol and firing it into the ground in front of the corpsman who came to get him for the operation.

The rains during the night had degraded road conditions, which delayed the move of the Panzergruppe. The III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 drove its SPW until 1130 hours to relieve the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1. Peiper had 14 Panthers, 23 Panzer IV's and four Tigers fit for combat. At 1230 hours he attacked Larasowka in the direction of Dubrowka with the Panzergruppe, which that day consisted of the II. Abteilung of the Panzer regiment's and the SPW-Bataillon. At 1400 hours Peiper took Dubrowka. The commander of the lead tank during the attack was SS-Oberscharführer Hans Siptrott of the 7. Panzer-Kompanie:

The company ran into strong defensive fire. Siptrott destroyed a 7.62 cm antitank gun in a fire fight and then, with his tank – preceding the platoon and the company – stormed forward to Dubrowka. Just before reaching the first houses in the village, he took a hit from a heavy antitank gun. Two of the men in his crew were badly wounded. Siptrott, however, didn't lose his head for a moment. The tank could still move – although it had started to burn – so he destroyed the antitank gun by driving over it, and cleared the way into the village.<sup>23</sup>

That day the signal soldiers overheard a radio transmission from Peiper which was typical in terms of his driving impatience and the original way he expressed himself. It was probably said during this attack: "So you're finally moving forward. I can hear the grass grow under your feet. It's enough to make me want to kick myself in the ass." The tank driver for SS-Oberscharführer Inmann of the 7. Panzer-Kompanie, Heinrich Burke, wrote about the attack on Ulschka:

On 23 November the company attacked from a woods; it moved at full throttle down a slope. There were fleeing Russians everywhere you looked, but then suddenly we took a direct hit. The tank was on fire: the loader was dead; the gunner, Gläsner, had lost a leg. Inmann, Vorpahl, and I were burned. Obersturmführer Rümmler was killed too. During this attack we lost at least six tanks.<sup>25</sup>

Orders from corps reached Peiper in Dubrowka: Advance immediately to the north to Asowaja by way of Starizkaja. After he had taken Lasarowka he reported at 1730 hours from Masteschko where the Panzergruppe was resupplied with fuel. The attack could only be pushed across the Sdwish after the

bridge had been strengthened. On this (or on the previous) day, Peiper may have been in tank 053 (belonging to the orderly officer) when it was knocked out. It is known that his command tank was not operational, so that he was possibly using a different staff tank. SS-Sturmmann Fritz zu Klampen of the signals platoon had been ordered by Obersturmführer Jahn to bring Peiper's briefcase and leather coat to the command post of the 2. Regiment. When he returned he saw that tank 053 (a Panzer III) had already gone into action. He was normally part of the crew. It was knocked out shortly thereafter. It must have been a total loss, as it didn't appear again. Peiper himself was unwounded.

At 1230 hours the reconnaissance battalion advanced through Morosowka, Krakowschtchina, and Chomutez to reach the Panzergruppe. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 covered the Ulschka – Jastrebenka area. The I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 advanced to Karabatschin west of Brusilow, and the III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 pushed forward to Ulschka. For 24 November 1943 the Leibstandarte was ordered to attack Asowaja to the northeast, and SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 would continue to cover the flank. After strengthening the bridge over the Sdwish crossings, the Panzergruppe was to push through Starizja and take Marjanowka Fasowaja. Those companies of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 relieved by SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 were to be attached to Peiper immediately.

After Peiper's Panzer IV command tank (with the number 055 on its turret) had been repaired again, it was brought into the assembly area by its crew. Peiper's radio operator, SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl, recalled:

When we went to our billets the ground had thawed and become soft and bottomless. The tracks sank in deeply. That night there was a heavy frost and in the early morning when we tried to go over to the regimental command post we were stuck fast. Both tracks were frozen deeply into the ground. When we tried to break out using the engine, the differential broke and we were helplessly stuck. We tried everything to get the tracks free, but without success. So we rushed over to the repair facility to get a heater fan to thaw out the ground, which was vehemently refused. We chopped each link of the track free with hammer and screwdriver, and we were able to pull the track from the support rollers. We couldn't get the tracks out of the frozen ground with simple methods. We used hand grenades to break it up and burning gasoline to thaw it until everything was free.

The repair facility refused to put in the new differential for us, so we had to load it ourselves onto a farmer's sled and pull it to our billets. With a lot of effort and swearing, we three - the driver, Unterscharführer Becker, the 2nd radioman/loader, Sturmmann Kiel, and I - dismounted the old differential with crowbars and support beams, and installed the new one. It was exhausting work but we got it done and arrived at the command post on the following day. When we stood before our new tank commander for the first time, he examined us coolly and very distantly, and curtly told our driver that he was to appear on the following morning with a completely operational tank or he would be sent to the penal company. Otto Becker, whom Schönberger had brought along with him from the assault gun unit, was one of those noncommissioned officers nothing could disturb and therefore, nothing could impress. However, the icy cold and cutting sharpness of Peiper's voice was something

against which he had no defense and he forgot his sunny composure and worked well into the night.

We heard from the other crew members of the staff tanks that Peiper had carried out his first armor attack in his usual way and had made a sharp attack on the Russian lines, which only brought him a direct hit on the adjutant's tank he was traveling in. The driver and radioman were immediately killed, but the rest of the crew was able to get out unhurt. In the next attack, which he led from the orderly officer's tank, the same thing happened, with driver and radioman again dead.

At this news, Otto Becker and I heaved a sigh of relief and thanked heaven for our damaged differential. But then our number had come up, and it was our turn for the next attack.

Peiper's behavior as he got into the tank was proper and amiable, no question or reference to what had happened. He threw me a package of 100 cigarettes and said: "For everybody - and I always get one already lit up!" We drove off to the assembly area and on the way met a man by himself. We immediately stopped and Peiper asked him his name, unit, and assignment. It was obvious that he would suffer no slackers. At noon we arrived at the assault company with which we were to move out. Peiper and Obersturmführer Jahn left us and we sniffed eagerly at the aroma coming from a field kitchen. Then Peiper suddenly appeared with three sets of dishes. He had brought us lunch. We were flabbergasted, for this would never have happened with our old commander, Schönberger. When I was still riding with him in the armored car, we wouldn't get anything hot to eat for days. Peiper had already won our hearts and we realized what comradeship meant to him.

This would be shown repeatedly in the days to follow, for he never asked more from his men than he was willing to give himself. However, he required that his officers and noncommissioned officers give far more than he asked from his men. During this first operation we broke through the enemy lines and operated in the Russian rear. During the operation we stopped at a railway embankment and came under mortar fire. When Becker tried to start the engine to leave this position, it wouldn't turn over. We had had very heavy continuous wave and voice radio traffic, and the battery went on strike. Peiper ordered me to get out and to crank it up by hand. Hatch open and out, pull the crank out of its stowage brackets and raced to the rear of the tank, insert the crank, and give it a turn. Wasn't that damned thing ever going to turn over? The air was full of iron and the fire was getting closer - there, the engine fired relieved, I slid into my front seat on the right-hand side.

Peiper tersely said: "Well done!" and then gave the order: "Panzer march!" On our next push through the Russian lines, we were hit by a 2 cm solid projectile, which penetrated the steel apron on the side but which stuck in the side armor about the height of my head. During a visit in Traves, Peiper gave me the shell as a souvenir."

(Nothing further is known concerning those crew members of the staff tanks who were killed in action. They are not mentioned in the casualty lists.)

On 24 November 1943 Peiper moved out with the Panzergruppe at 1230 hours and ran up against a strong Soviet Pakfront west of Starizja. At the same time enemy tanks attacked Mal Karaschin from the north. A tank battle developed, in which Peiper's tanks held their own and, in spite of their loss-

es, destroyed six enemy tanks and pushed into the middle of the village of Starizja. At 1540 hours Guhl radioed that he was at the eastern edge of Starizja facing a strong antitank gun position which had halted the SPW-Bataillon's attack in front of well constructed enemy field positions on Hill 185.4. In the meantime the last elements of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, except for the I. Bataillon, had been relieved by SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1. A War Reporter described this engagement:

The tank fighting took on a new appearance in the Kiev – Korosten highway triangle in the fall and winter of 1943. Soviet antitank gun regiments strewed hundreds of guns, antitank rifles of all calibers, barriers and solid antitank gun fronts across the landscape. In villages and field positions, they lurked with their barely visible guns behind every tractor road and put the tank crews to a hard test. At that time Michael Wittmann wasn't the only one to develop a hatred for these barely visible enemies, who had completely mastered the craft of fighting man against tank by then. A tank is nothing to get nervous about, but the devil can take the antitank guns! <sup>28</sup>

It was not the Soviet tanks but the massively constructed antitank gun fronts which increasingly became the main enemy facing friendly tanks, and not just for the Tiger of SS-Untersturmführer Wittmann. A frontal attack on a well-camouflaged and well spread out Pakfront necessarily caused losses and, for that reason, was avoided. If an undetected Pakfront was suspected in an area before an armor attack, a tank, often a Tiger, would briefly occupy an exposed position to entice the Soviet gunners to fire their antitank guns and betray their positions. This sort of reconnaissance, to detect whether and where a Pakfront might be lurking, was not without danger to the exposed tank. Immediately after the muzzle flashes of the first antitank guns opening fire, the driver moved the tank rapidly back, but this didn't always keep it from getting hit in the front.

The attack on 24 November 1943 described above is among those which took everything that Peiper and his tankers had to offer. During this attack, Jochen Peiper himself was to be found up front in tank 055. In spite of enormous physical demands, he appeared to be relatively calm in his white turtle-necked sweater which he liked and often wore.<sup>29</sup> He wore the Knight's Cross on a leather band under the collar of the completely non-regulation sweater and the black Panzer uniform over the sweater. Outside the tank he could often be seen in his leather coat.

SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper almost always led the Panzer regiment along with the SPW-Bataillon as an Panzergruppe. He perfected the employment of this tactical Kampfgruppe. And the men soon found out who they had gotten as commander. The signals section leader for the staff, SS-Rottenführer Willy Micheluzzi remembered: "As far as the command of the Panzer regiment was concerned, it seemed to us that a shock-wave had reverberated through the entire regiment and the tankers changed their ideas of assault tactics." 30

Three or four tanks stood by as a reserve next to Peiper's regimental command post. In action they were commanded by the 1st Orderly Officer, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer.<sup>31</sup> There were also a few SPW of the 14. Panzer-Pionier-Kompanie in the vicinity of the command post. Three SPW from the maintenance platoon were frequently attached to the "Panther"-Bataillon for reconnaissance duties.<sup>32</sup>

An account of an attack by Peiper in the first days of his command which miscarried is available. SS-Unterscharführer Adalbert Wichmann who participated in this attack wrote:

With a large number of Panzer IV's, V's and Tigers, we headed toward a Russian column marching in the red of the evening sunset. We were expected by Russian 7.62 cm antitank guns, which shot up the whole lot of us from about 120 degrees to the right front. When the first vehicles were hit and immediately caught on fire, there was a large traffic jam which gave the Russians an even better target. Mostly it was the Panthers that were hit in the side of the hull. It was a catastrophe. Because of it, our attack was called off immediately. I lost command of my tank right away. Peiper's tank had been destroyed and, without a word, he took over my tank.<sup>33</sup>

On 25 November 1943 the attack to the north was called off. Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 73 of the 19. Panzer-Division relieved SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment1 in Jastrebenka, which was then moved to Dubrowka. In the afternoon, the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 relieved the SPW-Bataillon in Lasarowka. The five armor divisions of the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps were then positioned parallel to each other in an attack to the northeast, to push in the Russian bridgehead on the Dnieper west of Kiev. At 1715 hours the corps issued orders to cease all preparations for further attack and go over to the defense. That order ended the battle for Brusilow for the Leibstandarte.

In this, the fourth winter of the war, the situation for Germany was more critical than ever. Jochen Peiper recognized the scope of this threat as it developed. Daily he stood on the front lines, opposing the onrushing Soviet masses, and saw the enormous amounts of men and materiel that the Soviets threw into battle. He asked himself how this threatening avalanche was to be stopped. He knew that the invasion of France was expected, and that Germany then would be fighting on two fronts. He knew that only German divisions were still fighting on the southern front in Italy and that his homeland was suffering under the ruthless terror campaign of English and American bombing raids and how severely this was affecting Germany's war production. These considerations led Peiper to the conclusion that Germany could no longer win the war purely by military means.

In 1943 Peiper had already clearly expressed his fears to the officers in the SPW-Bataillon, after returning from a visit to Berlin when, among other things, he met with Himmler. (The date of the Berlin visit can no longer be determined.)<sup>34</sup> In particular his expression at the time, "The framework is creaking", stayed in his officers' memories. But for Peiper there was never the slightest trace of pessimism or neglect in the execution of his duties.<sup>35</sup>

The commander of the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Röhwer, recalled that after the landing of the Americans in Sicily in July 1943, Peiper had told him: "Herr Röhwer, the war is lost.' He very clearly explained to me his well-reasoned conclusion why Germany could no longer win the war." <sup>36</sup>

Along with this depressing knowledge, which was subliminally ever present, the uninterrupted physical demands on Peiper put a great stain on him. He attempted to compensate for his fatigue by consuming large amounts of strong coffee. He also smoked heavily.<sup>37</sup> Contributing to the strain was his circulatory weakness, mostly unnoticed by those around him. The not very

physically robust Berliner got the maximum he could from his body.<sup>38</sup>

On 26 November 1943 the Leibstandarte handed over its sector to the 1. Panzer-Division and by 1300 hours had reached the area south of Negrebowka-Sabelotschje. It was planned to hit the enemy forces advancing to the south at Radomyschl in the flank. The Leibstandarte was to be used as a fire brigade again.

At 1400 hours Peiper and the other commanders were at the new divisional command post in Sabelotschie, where attack orders were issued for 27 November 1943. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, reinforced with the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and the 2./SS-Panzerpionier-Bataillon 1, was to open up the river crossing west of Negrebowka in a surprise attack and then to advance to Werbowka. The II. and III./1. SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment were directed to support the attack. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, reinforced by SS-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1 and the 3./SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1, was to swing to the east from the Sabelotschie area, open the Belka crossing and then push forward through Guta Sabelozkaja to the Garboroff-Rudnja line. They were to try to make contact with SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 southwest of Rudnja. The first battalions of the LAH and "Das Reich" artillery regiments were directed to coordinate. Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 of the army, which was reinforced by a battalion from Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 73 and a tank battalion from the 1. Panzer-Division, was to advance to Rudnja on the Kotscherowo-Radomyschl road and establish contact with the 68. Infantry Division at Lenino (west of Liwithenka).

On 27 November assault troops from both regiments crossed the Balka and the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 successfully took the bridge at point 170, three kilometers north of Sabelotschje, and established a bridgehead. The I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was unable to progress as planned because flanking fire from Negrebowka was too heavy. The III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 was involved in house-to-house fighting and tank fighting in Guta Sabeloszkaja and the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 in fighting in the woods northwest of Sabelotschje, which was taken at 1830 hours.

On the following morning, after crossing the brook west of Negrebowka, the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 ran into enemy fire and moved into the woods two kilometers west of the village. The III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 followed the crossing point of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and took the road junction north of Guta Sabelozkaja (northwest of Ssandritsch). It was pulled back to Buklytschety for night security. The left-hand assault group of Panzer Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 (1. Panzer-Division) group was able to advance on the left as far as Litwinowka on the Teterew, but the rest of the battalion was tied down at Potaschnaja. The armored Kampfgruppe of SS-Panzer-Division "Das Reich" - on the right of the Leibstandarte - had to repel several tank-supported attacks. SS-Oberführer Wisch was of the opinion that the sizable enemy forces to the north and west of Negrebowka and northwest of Sabelotschje had intended to attack, but were pulling back in the face of the LAH's surprise thrust to the north and northeast.39

Crew duties were assigned differently in Peiper's command tank 055 than in the other tanks. The continuous wave radio operator, also called the 1st radioman, sat to the right in the

usual position in the hull. In contrast to the other tanks, there was also a voice radio operator, the 2nd radioman, who also acted as the loader and occupied that position. The gunner was the signals officer, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn, the driver, SS-Unterscharführer Otto Becker, and the commander, Jochen Peiper. SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl was the continuous wave radio operator in Peiper's tank, but SS-Oberscharführer Hans Frings and SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Mück were also used in this capacity. They were responsible for contact with the division. Peiper's voice radio operator was SS-Sturmmann Heinrich Kiel, who was responsible for communications within the regiment. Peiper didn't always lead an attack in the command tank; sometimes he rode in a conventional one. This meant that he did without immediate communications with division, which he probably did not regard as a disadvantage inasmuch as it gave him greater operational freedom during his operations. To compensate, the radio traffic with the divisional command post or to neighboring units was taken over by the main radio station or by a radio-equipped, four-wheel, armored car. The armored car then traveled within view of the tank with Peiper in it. 40

Immediately after his first days in action, Jochen Peiper was fully accepted by his men as regimental commander. Peiper was designated regimental commander right from the start, not merely temporarily in command of the regiment, which was the usual case for someone of his rank. The regiment was finally being led with the élan and drive necessary for a tank unit. SS-Sturmmann Wilhelm Nußhag in the main radio post of the staff confirmed this:

When Peiper took over the regiment you could see a certain change in the regiment's leadership style. Whereas Schönberger was regarded as a rather timid leader, Peiper more or less embodied the opposite. Peiper was able to win the trust of both officers and men after only a short time. Through his exemplary courage in action and his solutions to the most difficult situations, he was the ideal leader for our regiment. The only contact I myself had with Peiper was in the delivery of radio messages. The personality he showed us was that of a reserved man who was difficult to approach.<sup>41</sup>

This description of Jochen Peiper's personality is doubtlessly accurate from the viewpoint of most of the officers, noncommissioned officers and men of the Panzer regiment. The close bonds which had developed between Peiper and the Panzergrenadiere of the SPW-Bataillon over the course of a year, had to be established with the men of the Panzer regiment. Jochen Peiper was straightforward and very proper. He couldn't stand slackers or toadies. SS-Sturmmann Fritz zu Klampen of the signals platoon recalled:

Once when bringing a radio message to the regimental command post — Peiper was playing cards with Nüske and other officers on the straw-covered floor — he glanced up at me and asked: "Benjamin, what is it?" I told him I had a radio message, but he instructed me to go back and put on my anorak, as I had showed up wearing only fatigues. Then when I reported back, he took the radio message.<sup>42</sup>

Peiper always kept control of himself, never carried a grudge, and even in his voice was never loud or uncontrolled in front of the men.<sup>43</sup> He was self-confident and was well aware of his responsibility for the Panzer regiment as the most powerful

force within the division. To most of the regiment the 28-yearold blond officer from Berlin seemed to be taciturn and it was not his style to engage just anyone in long conversations. His verbal orders were clear and unambiguous, his situation and orders conferences were precise and well thought out. His words could be contemptuous, and his smug comments, which could contain biting irony, often to the point of sarcasm, were well known. Behind his generally felt reserve, however, some suspected arrogance.

The signals section leader for the Panzer regiment's main radio post, SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Mück, who was in daily contact with Peiper and also served occasionally as radio operator in his tank, said: "There is no argument that he was very self-confident and sure of himself and his resulting manner may have seemed arrogant to many. But I personally believe that deep inside, at least toward his men, he wasn't really arrogant."44

Peiper's 1st Orderly Officer, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, documented this impression from his comradeship with him at the time and his subsequent years of friendship with Peiper:

Anyone who had only a brief encounter with him could consider him as arrogant, hard, and unapproachable. Anyone who knew him longer and as a troop commander would confirm that he was a brave, fair, and exemplary commander ... and anyone who got to know him personally and became his friend, knew that he was clever, well-educated, introverted, informed, modest, benevolent and very solicitous.<sup>45</sup>

On 28 November1943 the SPW-Bataillon attacked over the Garboroff Bridge, which had been repaired by SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1. North of Guta Sabelozkaja, after breaking enemy resistance, it rolled over his forces in his well-constructed field positions. However, at 1045 hours, the battalion halted at the south edge of Garboroff and refueled and took on ammunition in Bulytschety. Peiper's Panzergruppe, which consisted of the Panzer regiment and the reconnaissance battalion, crossed to the other bank and at 1120 hours moved west. After elements of the reconnaissance battalion took the Kotscherowo -Radomyschl road, it opened the way to the north and then pushed north to Radomyschl. By 1540 hours Peiper had pushed through enemy forces reinforced with tanks and antitank guns and had reached the fork in the road south of Radomyschl. SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann's "Panther"-Bataillon turned to the south and, traveling along the road, rolled up several enemy positions. It cleared mines and, at 1400 hours, was able to establish contact with the army's Panzer Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 in Potaschnja.

The two other battalions of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 were fighting hard along the line north Negrebowka – Sobolew. At 1645 hours Peiper's Panzergruppe wheeled from the fork in the road at Radomyschl towards Garboroff, where it established an all-round defense. The SPW-Bataillon broke through strong, well-constructed enemy positions south and southeast of Garboroff, took the village, and in this way eliminated much of the flanking fire directed at the Panzergruppe attacking further to the west. In spite of enemy resistance, the battalion advanced into the forested area to the north and northeast and destroyed an underground complex and most of those in it. On that day Peiper described the actions of the "Tiger" Kompanie and its

commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz "John" Kling:

In a thickly forested area with highly limited visibility, and generally without infantry support, Kling was the first to reach the important road and take possession of Hill 154.3. In relentless pursuit, while ignoring enemy infantry forces to the left and right of the road, he smashed through the fleeing columns and turned what was originally an orderly withdrawal of the Russians into a disorganized rout. Although only his own vehicle was still operational after this, he personally felt his way forward through several minefields in the dark to Garboroff, destroyed numerous antitank guns, and played a decisive role in the capture of the village. In the end, all he had left to fight with was his machine gun. 48

The Soviet counterattacks began that afternoon. Initially in regimental strength against the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, they were blocked by an SPW-Kompanie of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 at the embankment in front of the Belka River. By 1720 hours the SPW-Bataillon had thrown the enemy back in a counterattack. At 2030 hours a counterattack by the III. Bataillon repulsed an enemy attempt to break through the II. Bataillon. Another attack took place at 2145 hours at the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 position which was eliminated by the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. During the night the 2. Fallschirmjäger-Division was attached to the Leibstandarte to comb out the woods between Belka and Teterew and then relieve the division in place.

Peiper gave the commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, a free hand in commanding his battalion. The two men had known each other for a long time and could rely on each other. Guhl remembered that for Peiper, the slogan "one man – one word" was true.<sup>49</sup> Peiper led the Panzer regiment in joint operations with the SPW-Bataillon almost daily. The SPW and the tanks complemented each other marvelously in the Panzergruppe, and Guhl, who described himself as "an SPW man, body and soul", regarded the SPW as the best weapon after the tank.<sup>50</sup>

Of particular, fully documented, significance is doubtless Guhl's impression gained from daily experience in joint battle operations with Peiper: "In Peiper we had an unimaginably brave, far-seeing commander." The company commander of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, was well able to describe Peiper's natural authority: "Peiper never had to play the superior. He was simply the commander, everyone felt that and accepted it. He never dressed anyone down and he never raised his voice. His leadership was a natural." Peiper led with an imperturbable style and he recalled later: "My men had a bet going: 1000 marks to the man who could make the commander lose his temper." On 28 November 1943 Oberführer Wisch recommended Peiper for promotion to Obersturmbannführer:

He has a modest, level-headed, and energetic demeanor. As commander of the armored battalion he demonstrated clever tactical ideas and exploited every opportunity that offered itself to the division in rapid, decisive advances. This special talent for detecting and exploiting a favorable situation, as well as his toughness in the counterattack and his experience in carrying out operations within the enemy's main battle lines and in his rear, made him the obvious choice – since he is also exceptionally brave – for command of the Panzer regiment. A leader

whose drive pulls others along with him. His behavior corresponds to his character and is good.<sup>53</sup>

This evaluation by his former regimental and then current divisional commander Wisch may be regarded as a fully supported and correct description of Peiper as an armor commander. The introverted young regimental commander, seemingly unapproachable to many, concealed all the attributes which a caring unit commander should have behind a virtually impenetrable exterior. Very few managed to reach the real Peiper, but his radio operator Fritz Kosmehl was one of those, and he recalled that Peiper "presented himself quite differently to his tank crew. In this special situation, we had very different relationships, which were quite separate from those of pure command. His warmth, which he showed again and again on different occasions, betrayed something of his true nature which he hid behind a mask of cool, complete self-control."54

When the SPW-Bataillon with attached assault guns found itself attacking the edge of the woods west of Kol. Tolstoje at 0530 hours of 29 November1943, it ran directly into a Russian attack from the village which it repulsed. As the SPW-Bataillon had to carry out yet another attack with the "Panther"-Bataillon that morning, it was pulled back to its line of departure. At 0950 hours, under the command of SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann, the SPW-Bataillon and the "Panther"-Bataillon launched a renewed attack on the edge of the woods at Kol. Tolstoje, detected preparations for a Soviet advance and, in a lightning-quick move, tore into and destroyed two enemy battalions in their ready positions. The Panzergruppe was able to move forward against antitank guns in well prepared positions and pushed into Tolstoje at 1300 hours, where it was pounded by heavy antitank gun and mortar fire.

The SPW-Bataillon took heavy casualties. SS-Untersturmführer Walter Taferner of the 13. Kompanie died in the Bulytschety Woods, where the battalion had moved at 1530 hours. In the morning Peiper continued his advance on Garboroff with the Panzergruppe and took the village by 1000 hours after a stubborn defense. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 was able to extend its left wing from Sobolew up to the south edge of Garboroff. The Leibstandarte's SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 occupied the line Negrebowka Bridge - along the road running to the west - crossroads at Guta Sabelozkaja. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 occupied as far as the Garboroff crossroads (exclusive) and SS-Panzeraufklärungs-Abteilung 1 occupied Garboroff up to and including the Kotscherowo -Radomyschl road. Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 (army) was located from the Kotscherowo - Radomyschl road to the bend in the brook three kilometers north of Marjanowka.

Under Schönberger, the division's Panzergruppe – as led by Jochen Peiper – had hardly ever been organized this way. Only under Peiper's more resourceful and energetic leadership did this powerful, mobile Panzergruppe achieve its tremendous victories. The company commanders of the Panzer regiment finally had the courage to take risks, knowing that they could be sure of Peiper's full support. Finally, the Panzergrenadiere were available to support the Panzer IV's, Panthers, and Tigers. The Panzergrenadiere could follow the tanks everywhere on the battlefield in their lightly armored, all-terrain armored personnel carriers. They were in a position to provide infantry support to hold the ground gained by the tanks. The Panzergrenadiere of

the blowtorch squadron, as the SPW-Bataillon was known, had become dependable fellow combatants for the tank crews. They had become known for their overall aggressiveness. The commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, confirmed this: "The SPW were not some useless appendage, but a full partner."55

The 14. Kompanie of his Panzer regiment, which was composed of four SPW platoons, gave Peiper his own company of combat engineers. The SPW carried bridging materials, which were designed to make it easier for armored vehicles to cross ditches, trenches, fords, etc. When in action, these men provided the tanks with trained engineers for immediate mine clearing, which gained them valuable time. The company was commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Erich Rumpf.

At the same time the Panzer regiment enjoyed the recognition within the division which had been denied it under Schönberger's command. Peiper often visited the companies before an operation with his 1st Orderly Officer to talk to the company commanders and to individual tank commanders. SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Mück, who was a radio operator in Peiper's command tank for a period of time, described Peiper's concern for his men:

Just before an attack – it must have been the end of November 1943 – we were sitting on the command tank in an assembly area. The hatches were open. Peiper, Jahn, Becker, and I. Peiper lit a cigarette, saw that I wasn't smoking and offered his pack to me with the words:

"Don't you have anything to smoke?"

I answered: "No, Sturmbannführer, not at the moment."

He replied: "Why? Didn't the first sergeant bring in canteen stuff yesterday?"

I answered: 'Yes, but because he didn't bring enough, the officers got them first. We get some in the next delivery."

He shuddered briefly, and the conversation was over. About two days later, the first sergeant came back up front, and I heard how Peiper chewed out our "poor" first sergeant in a way I had seldom heard him use, somewhat as follows:

"If you ever again dare to distribute canteen goods like you did the day before yesterday, you will find yourself in the lead tank the following day instead of in a nice, warm command post. Remember this well. The men up front come first, everyone else second!"

The language Peiper actually used was certainly much more drastic!  $^{57}$ 

The division was assigned to clear out the woods between Belka and Garboroff on 30 November and 1 December 1943. In the morning of 30 November 1943 heavy artillery and mortar fire began, especially at Garboroff. The Russians advanced to within 400 meters of the right front sector and dug in. It remained quiet in front of the left sector. At 0600 hours, the 2. Fallschirmjäger-Division started its mopping up operation in the woods. The SPW-Bataillon was the divisional reserve.

Up through 30 November 1943 the Leibstandarte had suffered the following losses: killed 363; wounded 1289; missing in action 33. The on-the-ground strength of the SPW-Bataillon on 30 November 1943 was 8 officers, 24 noncommissioned officers and 131 men.<sup>58</sup> The veteran company commander of the 12. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Bruno Wessels, was

killed in action and SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Vieten of the Grille platoon of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie was severely wounded and lost a leg. The relief in place of the Leibstandarte by the 2. Fallschirmjäger-Division continued through 1 December 1943. Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 was also relieved and returned to the 1. Panzer-Division. SS-Oberführer Wisch thanked the commander for his helpful cooperation.

Jochen Peiper had three flame-throwers from the 14. Pionier-Kompanie of the Panzer regiment transferred to the SPW-Bataillon, where they joined the Pionier-Zug of SS-Obersturmführer Dinse's 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie. The SPW commanders sent along were SS-Unterscharführer Schuster and Richter and SS-Rottenführer Schwambach. Three 7.5 cm tank destroyers on self-propelled carriages – called "Marder" (martens) – were transferred to the company. They were commanded by SS-Unterscharführer Knappe and Feldvoß as well as SS-Rottenführer Rodenstein and Seberra. Because the Panthers were frequently hit on the turret, hooks were welded onto the tank turrets and track links were hung to reinforce the armor. The veteran commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmbannführer and Knight's Cross winner Hugo Kraas, described the hard fighting on 1 December 1943:

Once more we had to beat back the "red flood" from all sides and try to stop it. Clenching our teeth, hearts full of defiance, anger, and fierce determination, we launched ourselves every day in violent attacks. Since 10 November we had faced the enemy unflinchingly without pause or rest. In addition, all the elements had sworn a pact against us: rain, wet cold, mud; the highways, roads, and terrain were almost completely impassable! That's how we fought our way laboriously forward through water, swamp and bog. At night, temperatures were already below zero Celsius. The men were laying - drenched, encrusted with mud and filth – anywhere they could find a place in trenches and foxholes. Superhuman efforts were constantly required of us against an animal-like attacking enemy, who opposed us with a fanaticism which no longer had anything human in it! In these three weeks, serious holes have been torn in my regiment, especially among the experienced men, noncommissioned officers, and officers. Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal and Hauptsturmführer Becker - wounded. My old first battalion was commanded by an Obersturmführer. I had to part with Sturmbannführer Peiper, since the commander of the Panzer regiment, Obersturmbannführer Schönberger was killed, and Peiper had to take over his regiment ... Despite everything, we must all try to keep faith.61

# Operation "Advent" and the Fighting up to January 1944

The 1st Ukrainian Front had broken through, but the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps hit it in the flank and denied it access to the better network of roads south of the Pripet Marshes. However it was unable to inflict a decisive defeat on the enemy. The enemy assembled its 60th Soviet Army northeast of Shitomir and threatened the gap north of the city. The XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps was ordered to eliminate this threat by a surprise attack against enemy elements between the Teterew and the Shitomir – Korosten road. These elements lay opposite the German XIII. Korps, and this attack would make it possible for it to wheel against the Teterew and make contact

with the LIX. Korps lying to its north. This attack would be led by the Leibstandarte in an area which had not been reconnoitered. The corps refused to allow ground reconnaissance in order to conceal its intentions. The only thing known was that all the bridges between Shitomir and Korosten had been destroyed.

The units of the Leibstandarte entered the area around and to the north of Shitomir on 2 December 1943. The commanding general of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps, SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich, visited SS-Oberführer Wisch that afternoon. On the morning of 4 December Jochen Peiper gave a short farewell address to the men of the Panzer regiment who had been detached for officer training.\(^1\) On 5 December 1943 SS-Sturmmann Karl-Heinz Warmbrunn of the 13. Kompanie was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class. As a gunner, often in SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling's Tiger, he had knocked out 47 tanks. Some of the gunners in the "Tiger" Kompanie had equally high scores, e.g., SS-Sturmmann Heinz Buchner, who had already reached a total of 51 tanks in July 1943.\(^2\)

The commander of the 4. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto, and platoon leaders of the 2. Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Gerd Jahn and SS-Oberscharführer Heinz Knappich, were also awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class. In addition, 60 men received the Iron Cross, 2nd Class. Among them were SS-Obersturmführer Wilhelm Rümmler (KIA) and SS-Untersturmführer Hans-Joachim Witte of the 7. Kompanie, as well as SS-Untersturmführer Wolfgang Wagner of the 8. Kompanie. Peiper submitted SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling of the "Tiger" Kompanie for the German Cross in Gold. SS-Sturmmann Walter Kettl, an 18-year-old loader from the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, recalled:<sup>3</sup>

My first encounter with Peiper was on an icy December morning, when he personally presented me with the Iron Cross, 2nd Class. He pinned it on everyone's chest and, because he wasn't wearing any gloves, the Iron Cross fell out of his stiff hands as he tried to pin it on me. He was wearing a turtle neck sweater, with the Knight's Cross on a band around his neck.

The unit made good use of the days before 5 December to improve its combat readiness and for covert road reconnaissance. A march order was formed out of trains elements which was shifted to the southeast through Shitomir to deceive the enemy. The three armor divisions took up ready positions north of Tschernjachoff during the night. From there, they were to attack east along the Shitomir - Korosten road. For that purpose, the 7. Panzer-Division was moved to Woldarsk, the 1. Panzer-Division to Federowka and the Leibstandarte to Sseljanschtschina. Jochen Peiper concentrated on the preparations for this important attack. He assembled Kampfgruppe Peiper, which consisted of his Panzer regiment, the SPW-Bataillon, the reinforced Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung under SS-Sturmbannführer Knittel, the 2. Panzer-Pionier-Kompanie under SS-Untersturmführer Fellhauer and the 5. Flak-Batterie. On 4 December 1943 he had the following tanks available to him: four Panzer III's; 30 Panzer IV's; 28 Panthers; and four Tigers. A larger number was undergoing repair. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was given the mission to follow Kampfgruppe Peiper, take Korischewka and then take Tortschin.4

Shortly after the attack, SS-Oberführer Wisch wrote a brief

description of Kampfgruppe Peiper's operation.

On 4 December 1943 the division was given the mission to mount an attack from the area northwest of Tschernjachoff, cross the line Mokrenschtschina – Pekarschtschina into the flank of the enemy forces facing the XIII. Korps, and smash these forces. Then, along with the other divisions of the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps, it was to make it possible for the XIII. Korps to wheel against the Teterew in combination with an advance by the LIX. Korps and establish contact with that corps.

Kampfgruppe Peiper was given the mission, starting at 1500 hours on 5 December 1943, of bypassing enemy-occupied Tschernjachoff on the west by night, gain ground north of Tschernjachoff on a broad front through Andrejew and the heights on both sides of Styrty and later, without regard to flanking threats, move toward Radomyschl.

After the forward elements of the Kampfgruppe had taken Sseljanschtschina at 2000 hours on 5 December 1943, reconnaissance by the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 discovered that the enemy had taken up positions in depth west of Pekarschtschina and had set up for an all-round perimeter defense in the village itself. As the village could not be bypassed because of unfavorable terrain conditions, and the bridges in the village had to fall into our hands undamaged, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper took over personal command of the armored battalion, which he had commanded shortly before, and carried out a night attack on this village with incredible fury, relentlessly destroying the enemy forces in its positions in and in front of the village using its flame-throwers and other weapons from the SPW.

Initially, Peiper went along in Guhl's SPW on this night attack on Pekarschtschina, for which Guhl was recommended for the Knight's Cross:

SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl knew the importance of occupying this village as we had to have the only intact 50 ton bridge in our possession. After a short personal reconnaissance, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl launched his battalion in an attack on Pekarschtschina at the rising of the moon. Ignoring defensive fire from antitank guns, machine guns, and antitank rifles, he went into the village at top speed, firing from everything he had, overpowered three well-constructed defensive systems in front of and in the village, set most of the village on fire with his flame-thrower vehicle, pushed into the eastern part of Pekarschtschina, captured the bridge and, after wiping out strong elements of enemy infantry, established a bridgehead. While he was attempting to carry out a reconnaissance of the next village with his only remaining two SPW, his SPW was hit by a round from an antitank rifle on the machine gun shield. SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl received severe head injuries from this and lost an eye.6

In the dark, Guhl could only detect the Soviet antitank rifle by its muzzle-flash and report, and then it was too late to avoid the projectile. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs reported:

During this night attack, Guhl and I rode together in the same armored personnel carrier, when the round from an antitank rifle hit our protective shield. We were standing next to each other and observing the enemy. Guhl was standing to the left in front of me when he was hit. We put a bandage on him and I ordered the SPW to an aid station. Peiper was also on the battlefield in

an SPW, some 50 meters away from us. I ran over to him and reported. Dinse was given command of the battalion at that moment, and I got in with him.<sup>7</sup>

The attack continued:

A subsequent reconnaissance against Andrejew, personally led by SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper, yielded important results for the attack of his Panzergruppe the next day. On the basis of his reconnaissance the previous night, he launched his attack as the morning dawned (author: 6 December 1943) and, after smashing a Pakfront, he was able to capture Andrejew around 0600 hours and block the Tschernjachoff - Korosten highway. East of Andrejew, the Kampfgruppe rolled over a few batteries and, at 1000 hours, after destroying several antitank gun strong points, reached the heights on both sides of Styrty, the day's objective. In a furious advance, the Kampfgruppe pushed further to the east, smashed and destroyed enemy batteries and antitank gun fronts and during this advance overran the command posts of the 121st Rifle Division at Kisselewka, the 322nd Rifle Division at Seliyzchy, the 148th Rifle Division in Kamenny Brid, and the 336th Rifle Division in Kaitanowka, where it was necessary to stop for supplies.

On this day the Kampfgruppe captured or destroyed 22 guns, 76 7.62 cm antitank guns, 38 antitank rifles, 49 machine guns, 40 vehicles, and 71 horse-drawn vehicles; 1450 enemy soldiers dead.

During this advance, under conditions of extreme difficulty regarding orientation and terrain, the Panzergruppe had gone 30 kilometers deep into the enemy's rear area, caused the entire Russian front along a 30 kilometer width to waver and made it possible for the divisions of the XIII. Korps to advance.8

During the destruction of the Pakfront on 6 December1943 mentioned above, SS-Untersturmführer Wittmann of the "Tiger" Kompanie especially distinguished himself.9

When Peiper took the railroad line west of Tortschin at 1430 hours he planned to halt for supplies. However, SS-Obersturmbannführer Rudi Lehmann, the divisional operations officer, wanted to have him continue his advance to Tschaikowka, but the radioman in his Panzer III staff tank didn't know the call sign for the Panzer regiment. So, on Lehmann's order, he signaled "Jochen, this is Rudi, over!" to the radio net of the Panzergruppe, whereupon Peiper's radioman actually responded. As Peiper didn't want to move out immediately, Lehmann asked his friend if perhaps he were tired. Peiper's irritated answer: "Kiss my ass! I'm attacking! Out!" <sup>10</sup> At 1600 hours, Peiper moved out with the Panzer regiment and the Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung from Tortschin to Tschaikowka.<sup>11</sup>

SS-Oberführer Wisch continued:

Since the enemy had temporarily interrupted the supply route during the course of 6 December 1943, the Panzergruppe wasn't able to continue its advance west to Tschaikowka until sometime in the afternoon of 7 December 1943. The Russians had rapidly brought in antitank guns and fortified the terrain to an extraordinary degree. In order to avoid casualties, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper decided not to move out until darkness, when he would bypass Tschaikowka to the north and then advance east.

Around 1900 hours, the Panzergruppe was already in the

enemy's rear, had eliminated the resistance of a few antitank guns, and had advanced about 10 kilometers to the east. The Kampfgruppe then wheeled to the north on orders from division, took Chodory, then pushed on to the north into the heavily fortified Sabolot. After intense house-to-house fighting, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper was able to report by 1000 hours in the morning that the village was firmly in our hands. During this night attack, Kampfgruppe Peiper captured or destroyed: one T-34 tank, eight guns, one 4.5 cm antitank gun, 61 7.62 cm antitank guns, 21 antitank rifles, 55 machine guns, five trucks, 930 enemy dead, and three prisoners. As a result of this night attack - once again operating deep behind the enemy lines - SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper had smashed a breach through the enemy's defensive system of deeply echeloned strong points and prevented it from establishing an operational bridgehead across the Teterew.

During this period of combat SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper demonstrated extraordinary personal bravery as well as outstanding tactical leadership of his strong unit. His personal dash, his battle plan, and the decisive execution of that plan, as well as his lightning fast recognition and exploitation of favorable opportunities, contributed to this major victory for his Panzergruppe and, by extension, for the division. In addition, during the brief period from 21 November to 24 December 1943, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, under the command of SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper, captured or destroyed a total of 100 T34 tanks, 11 guns, 124 7.62 cm antitank guns, 24 antitank rifles, 16 trucks, 14 prime movers, seven antiaircraft guns, and two aircraft (IL 2).

For the extraordinary personal bravery which he has continuously shown and for the outstanding leadership he has given his regiment, I consider SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper worthy of the award of the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross and request that this high decoration be granted to him.

Signed: Wisch

SS-Oberführer and Divisional Commander 12

Peiper was awarded the Oak Leaves on 27 December 1943 following this recommendation, quoted here in its entirety. His tank crew during this successful operation consisted of SS-Unterscharführer Helmut "Hein" Mück as continuous wave radio operator, SS-Sturmmann Heini Kiel as voice radio operator, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn, the regimental signals officer, as gunner, and SS-Unterscharführer Otto Becker as driver. During this large-scale offensive operation Peiper had demonstrated his skill as the commander of a major armored unit. Throughout the operation, he led calmly and deliberately from the front in his command tank and seldom used the radio to intervene in the armor attack once underway.<sup>13</sup> He enjoyed using the SPW battalion for especially difficult assignments on a case-by-case basis and his particular specialty was to carry out highly successful night attacks with the Panzer regiment. SS-Untersturmführer Gührs presented the general opinion of the officers in the Panzergruppe:

Peiper was the perfect model of a German officer. He had charismatic influence on all of us and extraordinary gifts as a soldier. In addition, during the entire war he was famous for his luck as a soldier, and he was very brave. Quite simply, everything he attempted was a success. We trusted him even during the most daring of operations. As far as his luck was concerned:

he was already commander of the Panzer regiment. We carried out a night attack with all the armored elements of the division, which meant the Panzer regiment, the assault guns, the armored battalion – more than 150 tracked vehicles. Nine o'clock was given as the direction of attack. After driving for a half hour, I drove to Peiper's command tank in my vehicle to tell him that the entire Kampfgruppe was moving in a different direction. There wasn't anything that could be done to change it and shortly after we found ourselves in a major tank battle. Two days later Peiper told me that he had been ordered to appear before the general commanding the army, and he expected a major reprimand. Not at all, which was typical for Peiper. The general thanked Peiper because he had turned around and smashed into the side of powerful Russian forces during their approach march. 14

A few more details concerning this three-day period of combat should be added in connection with the report in SS-Oberführer Wisch's recommendation for Peiper's Oak Leaves. On 6 December 1943 during the attack described previously, SS-Obersturmführer Kurt Kleist, commander of the 3. Panzer-Kompanie and his platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Friedl Tibcke, were killed in action at Sliptschisy. The 37-year-old Standartenführer of the Allgemeine-SS, "Kulle" Kleist, and the young Tibcke (Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Tank Destruction Badge), were beloved officers. Their two Panthers were destroyed one right after the other by the same antitank gun, which placed its deadly rounds at the level of the number 3 on the turrets. The tank drivers had not noticed the hits at first and kept on going.

On 7 December 1943 the Panthers of the 4. Kompanie under SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto went to protect the right flank of the I. Abteilung.

When, at about 1500 hours, the lead elements ran into a strong Pakfront at Chodory – firing effectively from the front and sides – it was Otto, on his own initiative and under great personal danger, who headed so far forward at the head of his company that he was able to decisively support the 2. Kompanie. The 2. Kompanie was involved in a serious firefight, and he made it possible for it to withdraw as the fighting continued." 15

SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann described the 2. Kompanie and its commander, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Stübing, during this action:

During the withdrawal at Chodory – in spite of heavy antitank gun fire – he kept his vehicle up close to the enemy until the regiment could withdraw from out of the light of the destroyed tanks, burning like torches. Then he sent his tank back and led the efforts to save the wounded in the tank that had initially followed him. The company, with his close personal participation, destroyed 15 heavy antitank guns, five trucks, 20 antitank rifles, 14 heavy machine guns, and some 150 enemy. 16

The Panzergruppe participated in the attack on Sabolot described above on 8 December 1943, moving out at 0545 hours. The enemy had established a strong Pakfront. While the I. (Panther) Abteilung provided covering fire, Peiper ordered the II. (Panzer IV) Abteilung to attack from the right. After launching the attack, however, it ground to a halt in strong defensive fire. In this critical situation the commander of the 2. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Stübing, took the initiative, tore forward with his company and broke into Sabolot at its

head. The Russians fled. At the last moment, however, Stübing's Panther was hit three times by antitank gun fire and burst into flames. In spite of severe burns, the officer from Brandenburg saved his badly wounded gunner.<sup>17</sup> Stübing himself had severe facial burns and was no longer fit for active service. On 13 February 1944 he was awarded the German Cross in Gold. The company headquarters section leader of the 5. Kompanie, SS-Unterscharführer Hans Oeser, described the attack on Sabolot and the death of his commander:

We had moved into our ready positions; the company deployed and attacked in a broad wedge formation. As our tanks emerged from between the houses and started across the open ground, we came under a terrible bombardment. Everything that the Russians had was aimed at us - artillery, Stalin organs, mortars. It was an inferno. I had never before experienced such heavy shelling. In spite of this incoming fire, Obersturmführer Scharke, who was to my immediate right, stood upright in his turret. His upper body was out of the turret all the way down to his belt. I wanted to radio him at once - I knew him well and was able to address him informally when we were alone - to ask him if he'd forgotten to get in. At that moment he was gone. I thought, thank God, he's come to his senses and gone back inside his tank. But then I received a radio message: "The commander is badly wounded, what should we do?" So I answered that the commander's radioman should call over the company net: "Stop the attack. Withdraw to the line of departure." And that's what we did.

When our seven tanks were back under the cover of the houses, I ran to the commander's tank, jumped up onto the engine compartment and then we pulled him out of the turret. He was pale, marked by death. Meanwhile we called a medic and he came running. We took the commander down from the engine compartment and laid him in the snow. I sat down, and he lay on my knees in my arms with his head in my left elbow. We took his cap off, and brushed his hair back off his forehead. He kept saying: "I'm cold. I'm cold. I'm freezing. Why don't you cover me up?" We covered him. Then he said: "Oeser, I believe that this is the end for me. Do me a favor. Write my family, my wife in Berlin. Please give my regards to all Berlin." After the word Berlin, he closed his eyes and he was gone. 18

At the battle for Sabolot on 8 December 1943, the commanders of the 5. and 7. Kompanien, SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Scharke and Herbert Sprunk, were killed in action. The leaderless 1., 2., 5., and 7. Kompanien were taken over by SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes (formerly in the Pionier-Bataillon and then orderly officer in the Panzer regiment), SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Schäfer, and SS-Obersturmführer Kurt Hoffmann. When SS-Unterscharführer Erich Langanger's Tiger was hit at Sabolot and immobilized, and Russians mounted the tank, the noncommissioned officer from Styria shot himself.

SS-Rottenführer Walter Kühn, driver of the SPW named "Falke" ("Falcon") of the 14. (Pionier)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, described the attack on Chodory on 7 December:

It was already dark. At about 2100 hours, our guys set two or three houses alight in a village that was to the half left in front of us. There was no return fire. A Panther was driving point in front of my SPW. There was also a village to the half right in front of us. When we were silhouetted against the glow from the village to the left behind us, we took heavy fire from the right from antitank guns or tanks. The Panther ahead of me took a direct hit. The turret hatch popped open and flames shot out. I received orders from my squad leader, Werner Küstermann, to turn around and fall back. As soon as I had turned, our SPW was hit. The shock of the explosion knocked my head against the armor, which knocked me out in my driver's seat. When I recovered consciousness I got out of that SPW as fast as possible. None of my buddies were still around. I had run about 50 meters away from it when there was an explosion, and my SPW was gone. Our detonating devices, Teller mines, and hand grenades had blown it apart.

Along with Kühn and Unterscharführer Küstermann, the remaining crew of that SPW was Rottenführer Karl Rippel and Sturmmann Peter Bochen. They were all badly wounded. The tank that was knocked out in front of Kühn belonged to the 1. Kompanie. SS-Sturmmänner Wolfgang Hartung, Paul Klein and Herbert Nacke were killed in the tank.<sup>19</sup>

During the attack by Kampfgruppe Peiper from 5 to 8 December 1943 18 soldiers were killed and 19 wounded in the Panzer regiment. Among the fallen were seven tank commanders (five of whom were officers). Five tank commanders were among the wounded.<sup>20</sup> A war reporter accompanying the Panzer regiment wrote:

The village of Ljachowaja was still burning. Large flecks showed up in the night, visible from a long way off. They shot up into a bright red when collapsing roof timbers sent a rain of sparks into the dark, dying out only slowly, and then finally vanishing as morning arrived. There still might be a number of Red Army stragglers crouched in the snow behind a wall, each one desperately wondering if he should fire the last round out of his machine pistol into someone's back or surrender. Every shadow was still an enemy to us, and no one wanted to try to guess what was in an armed enemy's mind. In the meanwhile, three kilometers to the east, the village of Sabolot had been taken by our tanks. The drooping, thin barrels of enemy antitank guns, which had waited in a solid front at the entrance to the village in anticipation of the attack, stand abandoned in the road or lay with burst barrels amidst their dead crews, who had fired up to the last second.

The Pakfront was so strong that the commander of the Panzer regiment, who attacked with only a few tanks, had to race into the village at top speed to avoid its fire. That was three hours ago. Now there were infantry combat units in columns on the long village street. They had to go back into action again tonight. It has become completely still, perhaps for only one valuable hour, because there was no one still awake except for those on sentry duty. The exhausted fighters curled up in their fighting vehicles, the hoods of their fur parkas keeping their faces in shadow, and the white condensation of their breath showed up in the night air. When it's time to move out again, their company commander will show up, map in hand, and say: "Let's go! Move out!" or "Night attack on Krasnoborki!" and they will have to nudge and shake each other for a while, until they have all emerged from unfathomably deep sleep and realize where they went to sleep in the freezing cold.

Four men sat around a table in the Panzer regiment's command post – two regimental commanders, a battalion commander, and a really young orderly officer. There was a damned fog

outside, and they were forced to wait. The conversation had ebbed, only seldom was a word spoken, and the young officer swayed on his chair, drunk with sleep. Only the commander (author: Peiper) got up, went outside, and came right back to say: "I think we can do it." He meant that the attack could then begin. As the few, frost-encrusted tanks in front of the door started up with a roar and the commanders left the room, the young man laid back down on the straw. There were a few minutes for him when he had nothing to do and who knew when he'd be able to sleep again.

When he woke up again, he was startled, awakened by a discordant, crazy noise. It was early in the day and the regimental commander was standing there, smiling over the confused man. He had found an ancient, battered bass tuba which wrapped twice around his body. He had elicited a frightful discord from it. "The Trumpet of Jericho", he said smiling, and called for coffee. During the hours of the night, he had reached the village Meshiritschka and his objective against a heavy concentration of antitank guns set up by a prepared enemy. A few minutes later, he sat there very erect on his chair, washed, shaved, and waiting for his coffee. In the previous week, he had slept scarcely eight hours.<sup>21</sup>

This passage described the capture of the depression northwest of Meshiritschka by tanks and the SPW-Bataillon on the morning of 9 December 1943. SS-Oberscharführer RFA Rolf Reiser arrived at the Panzer regiment on 8 December. His classmates – Köchlin, Pönisch, Krause, Pflughaupt, and Torn – were already in the regiment. After reporting in to SS-Hauptsturmführer Nüske, he also reported in to the commander:

When I reported in to Peiper, there occurred a conversation with an interesting background. Peiper asked: "Why did it take you so long to get here? The others have been here for three weeks already.

Reiser: "I was on marriage leave and home in Transylvania."

"You're from Transylvania? Do you know Depner and Kühn and the others in the SPW-Bataillon?"

"Depner was wounded and no longer fit for frontline duty. He was transferred to reserve command duties in Romania."

"So, did you come in with that bunch?"

"Yes

"So, from knowing Berger, then you probably also know Volksgruppenführer Schmidt?"

Peiper's interest in the men from Transylvania had a specific basis. In the spring of 1941 Andreas Schmidt, the leader of the German Volksgruppe in Romania, was married in Berlin. His wife, Krista Berger, was the daughter of Gottlob Berger, at that time SS-Gruppenführer and Chief of the SS-Replacement Office and Main Office. SS-Reichsführer Himmler and his adjutant Jochen Peiper were present at the marriage ceremony. District Youth Leader Depner was among the wedding guests from Transylvania. In the fall of 1942 Peiper's SPW-Bataillon was sent replacement personnel from Berlin, including 20 Bannführer and Stammführer from Transylvania and the Banat who had volunteered for combat duty. Among them was District Youth Leader Depner. This was how my first conversation with Peiper ran.<sup>22</sup>

Reiser was assigned to the officer reserve in the headquarters company.

On 9 December 1943 Peiper had two Panzer III's, eight Panzer IV's, six Panthers, and four Tigers available. The rest were in for repairs. The Panzer regiment's objective was Meshiritschka. SS-Untersturmführer Kalithensky's Tiger took a hit in Meshiritschka, and he was wounded by shrapnel in the face and arm.<sup>23</sup> Along with SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, Panzergruppe Peiper took Meshiritschka by 1930 hours after a stubborn Soviet defense, and the first elements reached the Teterew. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1's attack on Radomyschl bogged down in heavy enemy resistance just in front of the objective and was called off. The loader for SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling described an operation during this period:

After Panzermeyer, Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper was undoubtedly one of the most daring and boldest commanders in the Leibstandarte. We Tiger men were proud and happy when Peiper took over command of the Panzer regiment after Obersturmbannführer Schönberger was killed in action. As commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 (the so-called "blow-torch battalion"), he was already one of those commanders with whom you could feel safe even during the most daring of operations.

In December 1943, in the Radomyschl area, a Panzergruppe with four or five Tigers, a few assault guns, Panzer IV's, and a number of SPW and Schwimmwagen moved out onto a Rollbahn. We called any road a Rollbahn when it had been extended by tracked vehicles to a "road" of from five to sometimes as much as 50 meters width. During dry weather it resembled a highway, in slush or rain, it became a morass. We were assembling, or more exactly taking up ready positions, for an attack under the command of Sturmbannführer Peiper. Two or three Tigers under the command of SS-Untersturmführer Wendorff constituted the lead elements, accompanied by SPW from the reconnaissance battalion.

We advanced through a wooded area a good twenty kilometers into enemy territory, and then did a horizontal sneak - as Peiper called it in his memoirs – behind the Russian lines. On the second day, toward evening, we again advanced back to the German lines. I was a loader in SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling's tank during this operation. This was interesting for me and also a lucky break. Interesting insofar as Kling's tank was in the middle of the Kampfgruppe's staggered march formation and Peiper was immediately behind us in a heavy, all-terrain vehicle. So I could see Peiper from close up, sitting on the mud guard of his vehicle with his submachine gun ready to fire. We could catch many of Peiper's orders. It was a lucky break for me, because the forest roads and lanes were unusually heavily mined. Wooden boxes resembling fish boxes with yellow explosives and very well camouflaged. At least three of the lead Tigers during these two days hit mines and suffered severe damage to their running gear. We left them behind in the woods, and an SPW with five or six Panzergrenadiere stayed back to protect them. It was really a lucky break for me not to be in those crews which had to stay some twenty kilometers behind the enemy

We were really anxious to see what would happen that evening when darkness fell. That was also typical of Peiper: "All-round defense." In open terrain with little tree cover, his vehicle and Kling's Tiger were located in the middle, next to SS-Unterscharführer Molly's Tiger which had run onto a mine. All

the other elements of the Kampfgruppe formed a 100-meter circle like a hedgehog. For me, this was really one of the tensest situations during my service as a soldier, but Peiper and Kling, who were right next to us, radiated a unique confidence, although the entire night was full of skirmishes with enemy scout troops. Evidently, the Soviets were in a position where it was no longer able for them to distinguish front and rear. Sturmmann Wenzel, loader for one of the Tigers which had hit a mine, later told that they had entered a Russian hut to look for something to eat. In the hut they discovered a Red Army soldier who was doing the same thing. The red let his cooking gear fall from fright and, taking advantage of his surprise, the Tiger men ran for it.

Toward noon on the second day, the enemy lines had to be broken through from the rear. According to my recollection, only Kling's Tiger was still fit for combat. We went into position behind a hut to eliminate a antitank gun. We were moving a few paces behind the hut to get the turret and the gun aimed toward the antitank gun position, when we took a very strange hit. which made the gun wobble in the fighting compartment. I believe that Bobby Warmbrunn was the gunner. I had to open the breech block and, as Kling had supposed, we had been hit on the muzzle of the gun. The round was visible within the bore. If we had fired the gun would have blown up, which could have been fatal for us. Peiper, who was behind us, ordered an SS-Unterscharführer from the reconnaissance battalion to take out the antitank gun. We could see the whole thing, how the intrepid scouts threw hand grenades and then charged the antitank gun crew.

Late in the afternoon we reached our own lines and, exhausted, sacked out in Russian huts. Then something happened that was typical of Bubi Wendorff: He went from crew to crew looking for volunteers to help the crews left behind with mine damage. With a 3-ton prime mover, loaded with replacement tracks and road wheels, a little ammunition and some rations, we went back to the two stuck Tigers. With the help of the Panzergrenadiere of the reconnaissance battalion who had taken advanced positions in the meantime, we got them running again. Yes, there are a lot of reasons why Michel Wittmann, who wasn't at this operation, and Bubi Wendorff were so respected and admired by the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.24

On 10 December 1943 the Panzergruppe advanced from Meshiritschka to Krasnoborki but was stopped by heavy antitank gun fire from the eastern section. The tanks fighting the antitank gun positions began to take losses. The SPW-Bataillon was in close combat on Hill 154.2. The attack through Krasnoborki on to Wel. Ratscha was to be resumed on the following day and given support from the north by the 1. Panzer-Division.<sup>25</sup>

On this day SS-Panzer Radioman Edmund Martin of the 3. Kompanie wrote his parents: "The wide eastern plains are now covered with a white winter blanket. The ground has become hard again, which makes the fighting somewhat easier ... Our company was hit by some really bad luck. I have no idea why fate has so kindly spared me so far. Our fallen comrades inspire us to even greater efforts." <sup>26</sup>

On 11 December 1943 SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2's War Diary recorded:

1200 hours was set as the time for the attack on Wel. Ratscha. Foundation laid for the following battle plan: Attack position in the depressions 2.5 kilometers west of Meshiritschka. I. and II. Bataillone will attack side by side, with the assault gun battalion to the right of the I. Bataillon and the Panzer regiment to the left of the II. Bataillon, covering the left flank. The III. (gep.) Bataillon behind the Panzer regiment. Attack after a ten minute bombardment by heavy weapons. Taking advantage of this, the east part of Krasnoborki is to be captured as quickly as possible. Regroup there. The tanks and assault guns are then to cross the bridge immediately. After regrouping and taking Hill 170.2, grenadiers are to continue the attack on Wel. Ratscha using the creek bed which runs into the north part. From there push into the village and, turning to the south, mop up the village. Supported by the III. (gep.) Bataillon advance on Hill 171.1, providing cover there. 27

The attack began at 1200 hours and smashed through as far as hill 170.2. The Russians positioned tanks on the western edge of Wel. Ratscha. Nevertheless, the Panzergruppe broke into Wel. Ratscha at 1650 hours, but was no longer able to take Tschudin, which was occupied by strong enemy forces, especially since the Russians were putting down a curtain of fire from heavy weapons on the dominant east bank of the Teterew. A situation like the attack on Wel. Ratscha could have caused Peiper to make the sarcastic radio remark overheard sometime during these weeks: "If we don't get new tanks up front in a hurry, the Russians are going to light a fire under our ass." <sup>28</sup>

The fighting for Hill 170.2 was credited as an armor battle day. SS-Untersturmführer Gerd Jahn, platoon leader in SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes' 2. Panzer-Kompanie, described his battalion commander:

For me, Jochen Peiper was one of the most competent tank commanders in the Wehrmacht and, during this long war, there were enough opportunities for comparison. He really earned the high decorations which were awarded to him. But he wasn't just a great military role model, his outstanding personality was even more influential! A man of high intellect, clear and concise in expression, in his instructions and in carrying out his ideas. He was no blind daredevil to whom success meant more than his men, and we ran into some of those, but someone who could analyze, plan and execute, without overestimating our own strength or underestimating that of the enemy. Personally unassuming, humble. We held him in the highest respect, all of us. <sup>29</sup>

On 12 December1943 the III. (gep.) Bataillon under SS-Obersturmführer Dinse, reinforced with a Tiger and five assault guns, attacked in Badjalowka at 1430 hours, in order to get to the banks of the Teterew and blow up the river crossing. After the SPW-Bataillon and the Grillen had broken through the first position and crossed the village, the Kampfgruppe was placed under fire by a strong Pakfront that, together with artillery fire from the east bank of the Teterew, made it impossible to continue the attack.<sup>30</sup> It then pulled back to the west edge of Badjalowka. SS-Panzer-grenadier-Regiment 1 was in Sabolot.

The commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, wrote his wife on this day: "The best is that I can tell you that I'm still in one piece and healthy, and that means a lot to us! I am dashing off these lines to you in some shack here in the country. We've been in heavy fighting for the last five days and nights in unimaginably hard

combat. Our strength is running out." 31

The comment was made in his regimental war diary that: "As a result of the monstrous exertions demanded of the men of the unit in these last days of the attack, they are completely exhausted and, as a result, apathetic." The Soviets wanted to hold the Kiev – Korosten railroad lines in the Teterew – Irscha River triangle through their attacks against the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps and win the necessary space for larger operations. They placed great importance on holding the bridgeheads over the Teterew and the Irscha.

On 14 December 1943 the Panzergruppe attacked at 1130 hours, took Iskra and reached the Weprin - Fedorowka road. It then swung to the west and advanced along the creek bottom up to the crossroads one kilometer south of the eastern part of Fedorowka. Two tanks were lost there and three T-34's were destroyed. As there was no way to cross the creek in front of Wyrwa, Peiper intended to take the crossing at the east edge of Fedorowka. Starting at 2100 hours, on orders from corps, the Panzergruppe began to disengage from the enemy and shift into the Sabolot - Chodory area. The Panzer divisions were regrouped for a planned attack in the area south of Korosten, which was to hit the Soviets northwest of Malin. The Leibstandarte was moved to the west of Meleni. The attack of the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps had preempted any chance the Russian 16th Army had for an offensive of its own.<sup>32</sup> Peiper's radio operator SS-Unterscharführer Kosmehl stated:

When, after returning from our operation, Peiper and the communications officer (author: SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn) – who rode along in our tank as gunner – dismounted at the staff location in order to attend to some of their duties, we were left on our own. Although we had two Unterscharführer with us, we were never allowed to use any of the other enlisted men present for help, let alone for any manual labor. Everything the entire crew took care of in the other tanks, the three of us had to do on our own. Peiper was of the opinion that higher rank demanded greater effort. As the units shrank because of the high losses and fewer and fewer tanks were operational, he went with us on individual missions, and crouched along with us inside an ice-cold tank in ambush. Mostly, of course, he and Obersturmführer Jahn left the tank after an operation, while we set about getting our tank ready for action again.

As the horse comes first with the rider, that was the way we treated our 055. First we drove over to fill our tank and, when we were lucky, we could pump the 450 liters of gasoline out of the barrels with the hand pump. Frequently, there were only 20-liter cans available, which had to be filled with a funnel, a tiresome job. Then we went to take on ammunition. Only then did we take care of ourselves. For tactical reasons, we ate first, washed up, then fell into the straw, dead tired. However, this sequence was often interrupted when a runner showed up bringing orders for a special operation. But in those situations the battalion commander and the communications officer didn't come along; the orderly officer, Standartenoberjunker Köchlin, took command.

Since I – a radio operator without experience in loading – could hardly replace the loader, Heini Kiel wouldn't allow it. I climbed into the gunner's seat. Before the Panzer regiment had been formed, I had already received complete tank training in a noncommissioned officer course in the tank battalion and had a

theoretical acquaintance with the sights. There were innumerable fire-brigade operations such as that. <sup>33</sup>

The new orders for the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps assigned the mission to the 7. Panzer-Division to advance to the north from the Janowka – Budilowka area. The 1. Panzer-Division and the 1. SS-Panzer-Division would advance initially to the northeast and then, wheeling to the southeast, meet the 7. Panzer-Division east of Tschepowitschi. The Leibstandarte and the 1. Panzer-Division moved into their ready positions in two night marches, the LSSAH into the area west of Meleni. On 18 December 1943 there was a command conference for the attack on Tschepowitschi. The objective was the Malin – Korosten road, north of the vegetable collective farm.

On 19 December 1943 Peiper moved out at 1005 hours with the entire Panzer regiment. He had 33 Panzer IV's, 12 Panthers, and seven Tigers combat ready. Thirteen assault guns and five 10.5 cm assault howitzers of the assault gun battalion joined Peiper and SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in the attack. On its right, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 (with the attached SPW-Bataillon) was assigned to take the area northwest of the vegetable collective farm and to continue to advance to the southeast.

After the attack - organized in two waves - advanced well and threw the Russians out of Hf. Meleni, the lead elements found themselves to the west of the vegetable collective farm at 1335 hours. At 1520 hours Peiper, with SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 behind him, was able to take Hf. Baljarka after a tank battle in Stremigorod, destroying two T-34's in the process. Among others, the Assistant Surgeon of the "Panther" Abteilung, SS-Standartenoberjunker Helmut Schneider, and a tank commander, SS-Oberscharführer Berthold Krnger of the 5. Kompanie, were killed in action.34 Virtually all of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was involved in close combat in Baljarka. At 1830 hours the Panzer regiment's lead elements pushed into Peremoga; they were then halted by a Pakfront 1.5 kilometers to the east. The commander of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Walter Malchow, was there at the head of this tank attack:

Peiper was the best of all the commanders that I ever had. Under his command I had to take up lead position with my 6. Kompanie for every attack. But there I did it willingly and with enthusiasm. During the defensive operations some 100 kilometers northeast of Kiev, Peiper issued orders for a night attack across the Rollbahn. Both battalions in line next to each other. The I. Abteilung with the Panthers on the left, we, the II. Abteilung, on the right with the Panzer IV's. We moved out in that direction, until suddenly we came under antitank gun fire from our right front. We stopped immediately and queried Peiper. His answer was: "Keep going. They're not shooting any more!" And so it was.

After a good hour the lead tank of the I. Abteilung on my left ran over a mine. Naturally a halt and query to Peiper. Order: "Go ahead by yourself, there are no mines on our side!" And so it was. But then it got really hot and heavy. After a long march I determined by looking at the map with the help of the lighting inside the tank that we must have reached our objective. Report to Peiper. Initially no reaction from him. Then: "Spread your vehicles further apart!"

We had scarcely done this, when the smoke from several anti-

tank gun batteries appeared in front of us. We shot back, but I was immediately hit on the right front. Our radioman, Harry Bergner, was hit. We bailed out to pull him out. The barrel of our gun was over his hatch and wouldn't move. We pried off the hatch cover with the crow bar and pulled him out. He had been hit in the right leg. We loaded him into an armored ambulance with the wounded from the other tanks (there was a total of six). During the entire night someone stood next to us and calmly issued rapid orders. It was Peiper. It was horrible for all of us who had helped our wounded, for as the ambulance departed, it received several direct hits and burned completely up. Peiper was aghast as we all were, but he immediately gave clear orders to pull back the tanks to cover at the edge of the woods. Later on he found words to recognize us, the "lead tanks". 35

In its enemy evaluation, the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps commented: "By its rapid push, the LAH put his (author: the Soviet) forces in the Tschepowitschi – Meleni area in danger of being cut off." The XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps Chief of Staff, Oberst von Mellenthin wrote: "Such a coordinated attack from different directions could only be carried out by combat units of the highest quality. There was no doubt at all that the two tank divisions attacking there (1. Panzer-Division and the LAH) were among the best German divisions." <sup>37</sup>

The commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, had a unique experience during this unceasing, continuous fighting. While fighting in a village he broke into a house and found himself suddenly facing a Russian officer. There was no chance to grab for a weapon. Wordlessly, the two officers looked each other in the eye. Then the lanky Russian raised his hand in a military salute. Dinse returned his salute, turned and left the house.<sup>38</sup>

The number of tanks fit for service continued to drop. SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Wendorff dispatched a priority message to SS-Untersturmführer Michel Wittmann, the commander of the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1:

We need Tigers urgently! Situation up front critical. Strong Russian forces attacking from three sides. I'm going back up with 04 and 42 tomorrow morning. 11 has to be towed out by the repair section. It's in Hf. Baljarka. Please take care of that immediately. 31 cannot move back, as we need everything that can shoot here.<sup>39</sup>

The figures were the numbers on the tank turrets. Wittmann took over command of the "Tiger" Kompanie on 14 December1943 from SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling, since Kling was temporarily commanding the II. Abteilung of the Panzer regiment for SS-Sturmbannführer Groß.

At dawn on 20 December1943 the Leibstandarte pulled back from the enemy about 400 meters due to the terrain. SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper discussed the attack on the train station at Tschepowitschi with Oberstleutnant Bradel of the 1. Panzer-Division at Bradel's command post. It was decided that Bradel's Kampfgruppe would attack north of the railway embankment and Peiper would attack on the other side. Peiper's and Bradel's Kampfgruppen began their attack at 1330 hours. While Bradel bogged down in massed enemy fire, Peiper gained ground, attacked a Russian convoy and shot it to pieces. During this action Peiper's orderly officer, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, captured a map which gave the corps useful informa-

tion concerning the organization of enemy forces in the Tschepowitschi – Meleni area, which were just about ready for an attack of their own.<sup>40</sup>

SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 followed the Panzer regiment and was supposed to provide cover to the south at both crossroads north of Tschepowitschi. At 1445 hours Peiper's tanks were fighting for the train station at Tschepowitschi. By 1800 hours it was able to take it with the help of Kampfgruppe Bradel which had advanced in the meantime. They occupied covering positions on the railroad and road crossing north of the village. Because of heavy Russian antitank gun fire, for which they had no effective countermeasures, elements of the SPW-Bataillon had to withdraw to their jump-off positions at 1600 hours. An SPW was lost to a direct hit. Panzer commander SS-Unterscharführer Hans Oeser of the 5. Kompanie of the Panzer regiment described his experiences at the battle for Tschepowitschi:

We went in with three tanks. I was in the lead, SS-Obersturmführer Michalski (author: Commander, 8./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1) was second, and Hans Kazmaier, also of the 5. Kompanie, brought up the rear in the third vehicle. When I reached the houses of Tschepowitschi from the west, my night movement device – I had then the so-called Lux-Device, a device for night vision – showed me something containing iron in front of my vehicle. I radioed a question to Michalski: "Are there any of our tanks in front of me?" The answer: "No, they have to be Russian!" It amazed me that these tanks hadn't fired.

We headed in the direction of the railroad station, and about 300 meters in front of the station I saw to my right, some 20 to 30 meters away, a T-34 which was aiming its cannon directly at my right-hand side. At the same moment I yelled: "Punch it!" that tank fired, but the round went high and behind me.

As I approached the station, I saw an entire train full of T-34's which the Russians were busy unloading. I don't know, even today, why we didn't fire on those cars. In any case, we sped past that station at top speed and continued along the embankment toward the east. We then came to a railroad crossing and stopped in front of a crossing attendant's shack. We then received aimed tank fire from the village. I wanted to take cover behind the crossing shack and I ran the right track backwards up onto a tree trunk. When I yelled "Stop!" the track slipped off and I was motionless on the tree trunk. The trunk was so strong that the tracks no longer had any grip on the ground. With the help of a cable Hans Kazmaier pulled me off the trunk, and we moved all three tanks back into the darkness.

On the basis of a radio transmission from Michalski to Hauptsturmführer Kling for directions as to what we were to do, we were ordered to attack the village from the south. It was an open field without any vegetation with a small brook in the middle and the surface was covered with deep snow. I was in the middle, Obersturmführer Michalski was to my left and Hans Kazmaier was on my right. It was night – between 0200 and 0300 hours – and we had gone about 300 to 400 meters when suddenly I saw a dark spot in the snow. When I asked Michalski whether it might be an antitank gun, he said that he thought that it was a burned-out truck. At the very moment he said this, it opened fire and Michalski's tank was hit. I wanted to fire. There was a second flash and Hans Kazmaier on my right was hit. I fired once. I don't know whether I hit it, but in any case I saw

the impact, and from then on it was quiet.

There were two or three men, who survived from Michalski's and Kazmaier's tank crews. They were the driver and radioman in each case. They came over to me, got behind my tank and asked what to do. They said that the other crew members and the commanders were dead. I sent them back toward the embankment where there were some men from the SPW-Bataillon. I sent a message to Kling on the radio and reported to him what had happened and asked for further instructions. Kling answered that I was to stay where I was and wait. I took up position on the brook and was totally alone. There was no one within 500 meters of me. There was good visibility, and I would have quickly seen anyone approaching me.<sup>41</sup>

SS-Obersturmführer Roland Michalski, commander of the 8. Panzer-Kompanie, and SS-Rottenführer Hans Kazmaier of the 5. Kompanie were killed in action at the battle described. At 1930 hours the SPW-Bataillon reached the intersection of railroad and Rollbahn, and provided cover to the east and north.<sup>42</sup> The attack on Tschepowitschi by the main body of the Panzergruppe was described by a reporter who accompanied it:

It was then almost dark. We saw the antitank gun guns firing, their muzzle flashes seeming to come from out of the ground, but even those helped us to spot others. We had to be able to see, because the Russian infantry was running around the houses in the dark shadows and it could be dangerous. One of the dark huts seemed to dissolve in the shattering crash of a shot. A large hole devoured one side wall and the roof rose into the air like a straw colored, crumpled wig, which someone lifts off a bald head. Then there was a glow inside, a flame flared up, and in a few seconds, the house was burning like a torch. Then we were in the middle of the village. The commander's tank rolled rapidly along the lighted street to disappear back into the darkness between two houses. At the other end of the street, something exploded with a glaring red flame against a black cloud of smoke. It was a T-34! A second one close behind it exploded into a thousand pieces.43

The II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, pushing into the western part of Tschepowitschi, had to assault every house while under fire from antitank guns, tanks, and mortars. The I. and II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, under SS-Hauptsturmführer Bormann, were directed to relieve the Panzer regiment. They reached the eastern portion of the train station at Tschepowitschi at 2330 hours and made contact with the Panzergruppe which was in position on the railroad crossing two kilometers east of the railroad station. However, the Panzergrenadiere were unable to carry out their orders because of stubborn enemy resistance. On 20 December 1943 17 T-34's, 4 assault guns, and 44 guns were destroyed. During the night Peiper's Panzergruppe waited for resupply on the embankment east of Tschepowitschi. After midnight, he noticed numerous Soviet tanks refueling on the other side of the embankment. They hadn't noticed the German tanks yet. Depending on surprise, Peiper led his tanks in an attack on the enemy. Numerous enemy tanks were destroyed in the night attack.44

After SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling had gotten to SS-Unterscharführer Hans Oeser during the night, he pulled Oeser's tank back behind the embankment where the grenadiers were in position and providing cover in the direction of Tschepowitschi. Oeser described his experiences during the attack mentioned above when so many enemy tanks were destroyed:

On the other side of the embankment, in front of Tschepowitschi, we noticed a lot of traffic. When it became somewhat brighter, we saw that the train with T-34's had unloaded, and the tanks were taking on ammunition and topping off between the houses. At that moment Peiper rolled up behind the embankment with his command tank and a Panzer IV and asked me what was going on there. I said that we were just about to take on the T-34's. So he asked: "How much ammunition do you have?"

"I still have five or six rounds."

"Good, take all of mine that I still have in the tank."

Then he passed seven antitank rounds over from his tank to mine.

"Pay attention! There are three assault guns coming from the southwest to reinforce you. Don't knock them out on me!"

Peiper drove off and we went into position. We had three tanks, one commander was Unterscharführer Hans Ahrens from the 5. Kompanie. We opened fire and destroyed so many tanks that later we fought over who had destroyed what. We destroyed a total of 32 tanks, without the Russians shooting back. They were all hit broadside and burst into flames. We could hardly be hit, since only our cannons stuck out over the embankment. After that there was concentrated rifle fire on the embankment. During the next hour 20 to 25 of our comrades were killed by bullets through the head. Then the grenadiers' company commander told us: "You can do what you want, but I've lost too many men now. They must be Siberian marksmen, and I'm going to fall back." He had his men mount up and took off toward Tschepowitschi. We stood there and didn't really know what to do.45

The Grillen of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie were also in action on the railway line.<sup>46</sup> In the night leading into 21 December1943 the SPW-Bataillon had to repel strong enemy attacks. The Soviets put down mortar and tank fire on all the communications lines and their tanks, which had advanced to the railway north of Peremoga, were interfering with friendly traffic on the Rollbahn.

On the morning of 21 December 1943, Russian tanks and infantry were putting a lot of pressure on Kampfgruppe Bormann. "Under enemy pressure, the outpost line of the Kampfgruppe was pulled back to the houses south of the train station at Tschepowitschi. 1051 hours: Kampfgruppe Bormann was hard pressed on all sides and fighting stubbornly. The positions were held only by using all available strength." At 0700 hours SS-Sturmmann Wolfgang Günther of the 19. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 destroyed a tank in close combat and Grillen of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie destroyed two T-34's.<sup>47</sup> At 1300 hours elements of the 1. Panzer-Division moved north of the railroad to relieve Kampfgruppe Bormann and advance as far as it.<sup>48</sup>

At 1330 hours, Peiper pulled the Panzer regiment back from the embankment to Tschepowitschi railroad station because of unremitting enemy fire. During this move Peiper drove ahead of the orderly officer, SS-Untersturmführer Fischer, who was in Panzer III "051". While moving, the tool box fell off Peiper's tank. There were no Russians in sight. Fischer stopped his tank and ordered the second radioman, Fritz Lemme, to pick up the

tool box which was important for the tanks. Suddenly there were a number of Russians in white fur coats around the tank. They shot down the radioman as he left the tank and, at the same moment, climbed on to the tank. At first the driver stalled the engine as he tried to drive off, and it wasn't until the second attempt that the vehicle gave a powerful jolt and shook off its unwanted freight. Just ahead was the friendly frontline infantry position. At that point the tank was hit on the right side between the return roller and road wheel. That wounded SS-Untersturmführer Fritz Egger again. He had been shot and wounded earlier and picked up. The tank was finally left at the forward-most friendly positions.<sup>49</sup>

Horst Schumann, Fips Wunderlich and Herbert Schenitzki (driver) made up the crew of 051 along with SS-Oberschütze Lemme. It was designated as the orderly room tank within the unit. Fischer recalled that at that point only he and Peiper still had their own tanks, the others had been lost to enemy fire and the crews made it back on foot. The commander of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Walter Malchow, had his 10th tank shot out from under him but remained unhurt. SS-Unterscharführer Oeser described the fate of the three tanks which stood alone on the embankment:

Untersturmführer Wagner, from Nuremberg, a very young man who had just come from the officer's school, asked what he should do over the radio. He was told to get back to the unit. He told us – we were three tanks – that we were going back. Soon after we had moved out, Wagner and the other tank had already almost disappeared from view and my tank was moving more and more slowly and began to splutter. "What's wrong?" I asked. And the driver, Wisura, answered. "We must have gotten water in the gas when we filled up." It was so bad that the Russians were catching up to us on foot. I was just lucky that they didn't have anything capable of penetrating armor with them. When I radioed Wagner to stop and keep the Russians off my back with his machine gun, I received the message: "Charity begins at home." So I was on my own. I radioed back: "I hope the commander heard that too." And Peiper was also informed.

Someone put down smoke and when I came through the smoke, I saw Wagner's tank burning. Before I could orient myself, I saw a T-34 just 50 meters in front of me and immediately said: "Get out if we're hit!" Then I was hit twice – one to the left front on my drive sprocket and the other through the engine in the rear. We bailed out except for the driver because the gun barrel was over his hatch. He screamed: "Turn the turret! Turn the turret!" My gunner jumped back in the tank and turned the turret and then they both got out. We were on the right side behind the tank. I kneeled on the drive sprocket to look through my binoculars, and then I don't remember anything else. I woke up about a half an hour later. The tank was burning and I was lying alone in the snow.

In the meantime, my people had dismounted a machine gun and set it up. I had been shot through the neck, and my left side felt as if I were crippled. Then, while I was lying on my back, each of them grabbed one hand and pulled me north over the snow to a road. We wanted to get away from the tank. Machine gun and rifle fire whistled overhead. We made it into the ditch along the road and naturally discovered that we were in the middle of Russian territory. When night fell we moved west and arrived at the embankment.

We saw no one. Later a railroad crossing attendant's shack came into view. I said: "There are either Germans or Russians there. If they are Russians, I'll shoot myself." We only had my pistol with six rounds and nothing to eat or drink. Then it happened. An arm with a rifle barrel appeared behind the palisade. We held our breath and waited for the outcome – Russians or friendly troops. Then a helmet, a German helmet. And I passed out again. I woke up at a tank company of the 1. Panzer-Division. The company commander sent me and my crew back to Peiper in an SPW. Peiper was in a root cellar where he listened shortly to my report and said: "Beat it, kid. Get your wound taken care of first." Then I was bandaged. He asked if I needed anything. I said that my crew was thirsty. Then we got a pail full of black tea which we emptied in the root cellar.<sup>52</sup>

Along with SS-Untersturmführer Wolfgang Wagner of the 8. Kompanie, who was killed in action, SS-Untersturmführer Horst Beckmann, communications officer of the II. Abteilung, was badly wounded and taken prisoner by the Soviets at Tschepowitschi. He never returned from captivity. SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Alexander von Guelfenburg, the surgeon of the II. Abteilung, and SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Heinrich of the 5. Kompanie, were severely wounded. During the two days at Tschepowitschi the Panzer regiment lost 13 dead, 11 wounded, and 7 prisoners. SS-Unterscharführer Hans Oeser survived his neck wound and fought in the summer of 1944 in Normandy with the Panzer regiment of the "Hitlerjugend" Division.

Those elements of the SPW-Bataillon in action along the Tschepowitschi embankment took heavy casualties. SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs recalled an incident with the commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Obersturmführer Dinse: "He was barely 40 meters in front of me and was hit by a bullet. He dropped but, to my surprise, got quickly back on his feet. He was wearing a coat with a leather jacket under it. The bullet got stuck there." <sup>54</sup>

Gührs' 13. (gep.) Kompanie, which went into action at Tschepowitschi with some eight SPW and 60 men, came back out of this precarious position with only seven unwounded grenadiers. Seventeen had lost their lives, and all the rest were wounded. Gührs was wounded three times. SS-Sturmmann Jochen Molt of this company described the operation in a letter home from 6 March 1944: "One tank and six or seven men of the company got back from this massacre. The rest wounded. The company was pulled out of the line for the next few days ... It was terrible, but couldn't be helped." SS-Sturmmann Gert Quarthammer of his company wrote on 20 September 1944.

After an intensive free-for-all, we held out until nightfall. At the end, hell itself was loose in the village. We could hear artillery impact after impact. The firing died down as darkness fell. At 2200 hours I was brought back to the command post by Untersturmführer Sander, as I was the last one in the company still up front. There I had a regular meal and a chance to sleep before anything else happened. Then I went to Shitomir with Gührs.

Grille gun commander SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie, which fought along with the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, described his experiences:

An SPW with eight to ten wounded was on the embankment next to my Grille. When the Kampfgruppe had to pull back to the east edge of Tschepowitschi I took over the wounded driver's position and drove the SPW. The SPW was hit right in front of our lines, and I was wounded for the fifth time. 55

The companies of the SPW-Bataillon were granted a close combat day for the fighting at Ossefowka on 21 December 1943. On this day the Leibstandarte destroyed a total of 23 T-34's and

two antitank guns. The Soviet intention to attack from the area of Tschepowitschi – Meleni to the southeast against Shitomir with the main body of its troops was foiled by the Leibstandarte's attack. The Leibstandarte was able to accomplish most of its mission of destroying the enemy troops in this area. During the period from 8 November to 20 December 1943 the Leibstandarte destroyed 258 tanks. <sup>56</sup>

By 21 December 1943 the strength of the Panzer regiment had been reduced to six Panzer IV's, four Panthers and two Tigers. For such a small number of tanks, it was unnecessary to employ the entire regimental staff as well as those of the I and II. Abteilungen. For this reason the Panzer regiment's staff was withdrawn from combat command on 22 December 1943 and the command of all tanks was given to the commander of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann. This made him the equivalent of a regimental commander. Peiper himself remained at division, and he spent as much time with his regiment as he did at the divisional command post. 57 In comparison to Peiper, Kuhlmann was almost the exact opposite as far his personal action in combat was concerned, and that extended to his concept of tactical leadership qualities.58 Kuhlmann and Peiper knew each other as they had attended the same Junker School course, nevertheless Kuhlmann was not popular with either Peiper or with the "Panther" Abteilung.<sup>59</sup> When the "Panther" Abteilung was being formed in Grafenwöhr in the summer of 1943 Sepp Dietrich had intended to replace Kuhlmann with SS-Sturmbannführer Paul-Albert Kausch, who was forming Panzer-Abteilung "Hermann von Salza" there. 60

On 22 December 1943 those elements of the Leibstandarte at the train station at Tschepowitschi were relieved by the 1. Panzer-Division. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 covered the east flank of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and SS-Panzeraufklärungs-Abteilung 1 advancing on Meleni. The attack ran into very heavy resistance on the flanks and was unable to make progress. SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse and SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Babick in the SPW-Bataillon were wounded. 61 SS-Obersturmführer Walter Malachow, the veteran commander of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, was severely wounded in the back by shrapnel at the collective vegetable farm on the east Rollbahn while outside his tank. His platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Walter Blank, and SPW commander, SS-Unterscharführer Werner Martens, were also wounded, while SS-Unterscharführer Gerhard Arnold was killed. 62 At first, the first sergeant, SS-Hauptscharführer Michael Meschnarz, took over the company, followed by SS-Untersturmführer Benoni Junker from Riga. 63

On 23 December 1943 the Panzergruppe, consisting of 16 Panzer IV's, 7 Panthers, 3 Tigers and the SPW-Bataillon, was assembled near the divisional command post at the vegetable collective farm. In the afternoon part of the Panzergruppe carried out an attack in the 291. Infanterie-Division sector north of the Chotinowka road against enemy tanks which had penetrated. It destroyed four T-34's. SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, commander of the 2. Panzer-Kompanie, destroyed two of these T-34's and reestablished the old battle line. The commander of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, was wounded on the eastern Rollbahn, and the Panther of SS-Unterscharführer Paßler (3rd Kompanie) was destroyed.

In spite of the heavy fighting, the description by SS-Panzerfunker Edmund Martin of the 3. "Panther" Kompanie in a letter home on that day was characteristic of the high morale: "In spite of everything, I have not regretted for one second my volunteering for this group of guys. I am proud to be put into action right where the going is the toughest." 65

The XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps wanted to pull back the salient formed by the Leibstandarte and the 1. Panzer-Division in order to use these divisions to react to the enemy penetration at the LIX. Korps. The Leibstandarte pulled back its lines. On the morning of 24 December 1943 the SPW-Bataillon of the 1. Panzer-Division and 25 tanks of the Leibstandarte under SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling attacked enemy concentrations south of Schatrischtsche and established contact with the LIX. Korps at Grosin.

That afternoon in the Panzer regiment Peiper awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class to his communications officer, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn; the Adjutant of the I. Abteilung SS-Untersturmführer Gottfried Winterhoff; SS-Untersturmführer Fritz Eggers of the 4. Kompanie; SS-Untersturmführer Eduard Kalinowsky and SS-Unterscharführer Heinz Werner of the 13. (Tiger) Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Herbert Pegatzky of the 2. Kompanie; SS-Oberscharführer Paul Blohm of the 5. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Heinz Briks and SS-Oberscharführer Rudolf Hoffrichter of the 7. Kompanie; SS-Oberscharführer Hans Ebner of the 8. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Heinrich Gase and SS-Rottenführer Franz Jandrasits of the 14. (Pi.) Kompanie; and, the Surgeon of the I. Abteilung, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Heinz Pötschlag. Thirty-two tankers received the Iron Cross, 2nd Class, among them SS-Obersturmführer Emil Kraft on the staff; the orderly officer, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer; the command post clerk, SS-Oberscharführer Werner Hentschel; as well as the radioman in the command tank, SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Mück. In addition, numerous Panzerkampfabzeichen in silver were awarded.

An example of Peiper's concern for his men is given by his behavior on this Christmas day, described by his radio operator, SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl:

On this Christmas Eve of 1943, we came to realize how deeply our feeling of belonging ran. A lot of snow had fallen by then, and the icy cold held steppe and village fast in its grip. We three from the crew of 055 sat together with the other members of the regimental staff in our quarters, one of those poor huts in which the only comfort radiated was from the large stove. Then suddenly a runner arrived and the three of us were ordered immediately to the command post. Unsuspecting, we jogged through the night, hoping that this wasn't an operation. As we entered the large room, we saw, dazzled by the sudden light, a large group of officers gathered around a Christmas tree, and Peiper stepped out from its midst. He shook hands with each of us and wished us a Merry Christmas, thanked us for our support and, as a personal gift, gave each of us a bottle of schnapps and one of those fruit cakes from the Führer, which we had already received as members of the Leibstandarte. There his personal warmth, which he, for whatever reason, always hid, once again broke through his normally unapproachable attitude, which impressed many around him as cold reserve. He always imposed the severest discipline on himself and required it from every one of his men in combat regardless of rank. 66

Peiper sent Christmas greetings to his old SPW-Bataillon, commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, through his orderly officer, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer. SS-Sturmmann Gert Quarthammer described the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, hard hit by heavy losses, in a field letter. "On the 24th what was left of the company celebrated Christmas. It was the saddest Christmas I ever experienced." <sup>67</sup>

During the previous weeks, the Leibstandarte was always at the focal point of the fighting for the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps which, in turn, was the lead element for the 4. Panzer-Armee. The Leibstandarte had accomplished extraordinary things. Two of the three major Soviet concentrations which had crossed the Dnieper in November 1943 were beaten at Brusilow, and the third lost its offensive strength south of Korosten. The losses which the Leibstandarte had suffered in uninterrupted combat were severe. The casualties among tank crew were not so noticeable because of the drastically reduced tank numbers, but it was lacking experienced tank commanders, gunners, loaders, drivers and radiomen. In some companies medics were temporarily employed as tank commanders.

A loader in the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Sturmmann Walter Kettl, recalled: "On one December afternoon – we were in the process of repairing a track on our tank – a tank stopped next to us with Peiper in the turret, and he asked how long it would take us to finish the repair. We had to hurry as he needed us urgently for the attack, as we had only eight operational tanks left." Kettl left the Panzer regiment in January 1944, to become an SS-Untersturmführer at the age of 19. A war reporter wrote:

And so Peiper's Panzer regiment carried out one attack after the other ... During the withdrawal operations southwest of Shitomir, it was frequently these formidable iron crates which had to cover the withdrawals of many divisions. And so, they always had to be the last to disengage from the enemy. Often the enemy was already waiting for them in the new lines, which meant constant combat. Even at this hour this is the case. There could be no rest, as we could not allow ourselves any rest. This uninterrupted stress was regarded by these men as nothing out of the ordinary any more, and I wanted to know what those three men of the Panzer regiment who I encountered in the village of U. would have answered if someone had told them they were heroes. In ripped parkas and with fresh bandages, they were dragging themselves to the main aid station. When I spoke to one of them he placed his wounded hand in its blood soaked bandage on the seam of his trousers and stared at me from inflamed eyes. A shock of matted black hair which hadn't seen scissors for months and in which his cap almost disappeared, fell over his pale face. I asked him what he needed, and while he was answering me, a blood-filled louse crept over his neck without his noticing it. What these men have had to endure and the harshness of the orders which they have to carry out is something which can't be described. The fate of us all depends on them doing this. 69

On Christmas night the commanders of the I. Abteilung were informed of the changes in the situation. The LAH and the 1. Panzer-Division were to move with the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps into the area south of Shitomir as massed Soviet forces were attacking the XXXXII. Korps east of Shitomir and were already north of Kotscherowo. The sector was reached by 26

December 1943 as ordered and SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 provided cover along the line Woliza – Stepok and reconnoitered towards Popelnja. The third campaign in Russia for the Leibstandarte had begun there in November 1943. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 occupied positions at Gardyschewka – Woliza. At 1230 hours a T-34, which had broken into Woliza with infantry, was destroyed in close combat by a grenadier of the SPW-Bataillon. Young Sturmmann Willi Pfeiffer II of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie received a special leave afterwards and, on 5 May 1944, received the Panzervernichtungsabzeichen. <sup>70</sup>

Upon reaching Woliza, the village first had to be cleared by the 2. "Panther" Kompanie under SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes. An advance to the south by 30 Soviet tanks was hit in the flank by Malkomes and eight Soviet tanks were destroyed in a short, hard tank battle, two by Malkomes. In the evening the division set up new lines; SS-Panzer-grenadier-Regiment 2 was at Iweniza – Staraja Kotelnja – Staro Selzy.

An attack via Gardyschewa by the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 with elements of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 on 27 December bogged down in front of Andruschewka, so that the Kampfgruppe had to fight its way through to Starosselje. SS-Panzer Radioman Edmund Martin of the 3. Panzer-Kompanie described his experiences on 27 December 1943:

Rrummm. I heard the noise and, frightened, I woke up. At first I only knew that it was already morning. I didn't have time to reflect on what had really happened because there was another really frightening explosion and the entire tank shook, evidently hit by a shell. Clouds of smoke drifted forward from the fighting compartment, which confirmed that the enemy had surprised us and shot us. I tried to make contact with the crew in the turret by shouting into the fighting compartment, but no one answered. Because of the stowed shells behind the radioman's seat, it wasn't possible to see into the fighting compartment. It was almost a sure bet that we were in real trouble back there, and I envisioned my comrades blown to pieces.

I heard more shooting outside, but I didn't know if it was friendly or enemy fire. For that reason I didn't dare open my hatch, but looked through the periscope. To my horror I saw some gray figures leaping about in front of the tank. "Russians!" shot rapidly through my head. I was almost crippled by fear and had lost any ability to think clearly. So this was then the end of my young life. I picked up my Walther P-38 and with trembling hands placed it to my right temple. Then I thought of my mother. So I looked through the periscope once more and I couldn't believe my eyes.

Bersin was standing in front of the tank and signaling with his hands, ordering the driver and me to get out of the tank. I realized that I had entirely misunderstood the situation and opened the hatch above me. Still somewhat distrustful, I left the tank and the driver and I then heard what had happened. We had been surprised by five T-34's which had emerged in the morning twilight and opened fire on our tank group. Our tank was hit by an explosive shell and the concussion from it had torn off the hatch cover in the turret above Bersin's head along with the loader's hatch cover at the rear of the turret. The tanks had attacked unexpectedly and the hatches hadn't been closed. Although no one in the fighting compartment had been wounded, there was heavy smoke immediately which had forced the turret crew to bail out. In the meantime our antitank guns had

also begun to fire and destroyed two of the Russian tanks, which burned out completely, while the others pulled back. 12

In the evening of 27 December 1943 the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was attacked in the eastern outskirts of Staraja Kotelnja, but was able to push the enemy back with flame-throwers in a mounted attack. The 2. "Panther" Kompanie pushed the enemy out of the southern portion of the village and by midnight was able to reestablish the old lines. The Leibstandarte was defending a line some 35 kilometers wide.

On the morning of 28 December 1943 strong Soviet tank and infantry forces attempted to advance to the west on the Shitomir Rollbahn. The enemy tanks crossed the railroad line running parallel to and north of Tschubarowka, occupied the village, and assembled to its north to prepare for further attack. Thirteen Panthers attacked from the east but then wheeled and hit enemy forces moving toward the south in the flank and destroyed eight T-34's north of the road. SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Wendorff destroyed two T-34's from an ambush position at the crossroads north of Iwankowo. He then led his Tiger platoon in an attack from the northeast along the rail line against the enemy tanks at Tschubarowka and destroyed 11 tanks in the village. <sup>73</sup>

The Soviet infantry attacking the right flank of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 at the same time was destroyed in a counterattack carried out by the regimental commander, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas. At noon strong Soviet tank forces attacked once again. Wendorff destroyed three of the tanks advancing from Jusefowka. At 1300 hours the SPW-Bataillon was attacked in the depressions east of Staraja Kotelnja. As darkness fell, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 received orders to fall back across the Guiwa. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 used tank counterattacks to get some breathing space in the face of continuous enemy attacks. Hugo Kraas eliminated a penetration on the left flank with friendly tanks and men of his regimental staff in which seven tanks were destroyed. From the Panzer regiment, 17 Panzer IV's, 8 Panthers and 4 Tigers were in action.

On the afternoon of 28 December the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was in the Guiwa River sector under tank and mortar fire, holding back very heavy enemy attacks. The situation became increasingly critical when the river crossing at Wolossowo collapsed and the Russians threatened the bridge at Stelze. Only a counterattack by five assault guns brought some temporary relief. The crossing movement began at 1600 hours, in which the SPW of the 15. and 18./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 were the last to disengage from the enemy. They did this in an orderly manner. All heavy weapons made it back across the river. SS-Obersturmbannführer Kraas stayed to the last at the Iwankowo Bridge. SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper described the action of SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Wendorff of the 13. (Tiger) Kompanie on this day of battle:

In the afternoon hours, when the Russians managed to penetrate at Starosselje and capture the bridge in this area, the last remaining way back for the division's heavy weapons was through Iwankowo. Attacking with several armored spearheads, the enemy also attempted to take possession of this crossing and endangered the withdrawal of the divisional elements from the Wolossowo – Staraja Kotelnja area which were in action. SS-Untersturmführer Wendorff held off this Russian advance with his three remaining Tigers and made possible the retreat of an artillery battalion, the SPW-Bataillon, and some of our damaged tanks to the main battle line. Toward midnight he was the last to break contact and brought his three fighting vehicles to the south bank of the Guiwa. <sup>78</sup>

Tiger commander SS-Unterscharführer Willi Sadzio and SS-Panzerschützen Kurt Cisarz and Helmut Becker were killed at Iwankowo.

On 29 December 1943 Soviet tanks attacked Woroschino, where SS-Obersturmbannführer Kraas' command post was located. The Russians pushed into the northeastern outskirts. After the loss of the commander of the I. Bataillon of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, friendly elements pulled back to the village while the Soviets, advancing past Woroschino on the west, pushed to the south. SS-Obersturmbannführer Kraas hastily gathered up two Panthers and every available clerk, radioman, teletype operator, driver, and medic in the village and, leading from the front and carrying a machine pistol, led this improvised group along the row of houses in a counterattack to the north and northwest. In a resolute action, in which Kraas fought with his MG like his grenadiers, he pushed the Russians out of the village and was able to establish new lines on the edge of the village. Additional Soviet attacks were repulsed, which assured the withdrawal of the regiment that evening. 79

To the southeast Russian tanks broke into Antopol Bojarka. SS-Untersturmführer Wendorff took four Tigers, some only barely operational, and led them in a bold attack. Once again, due to his superior leadership, Wendorff knocked out 11 T-34's himself. Altogether, this gave him 58 destroyed tanks. For his success in the operations described above he was recommended for the Knight's Cross by Jochen Peiper in January 1944.80 Shortly after that, Peiper had Wendorff conduct a noncommissioned officer course for the Panzer regiment.81

SS-Oberscharführer Walter Robock of Panzer V "336" of the 3./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 recalled on that day: "I was attached to the infantry with two Panthers, two Panzer IV's and two assault guns. After the coordination was concluded I tried to disappear into my turret, when a Russian sniper got me: shot through the neck!" SS-Untersturmführer Herbert Schönfellner was killed at Woliza. On this day a total of 59 enemy tanks were destroyed, resulting in the Wehrmacht Report for 31 December 1943 announcing: "... During the continuous defensive operations in the Shitomir sector the 1. SS-Panzer-Division 'LAH', under the command of Oberführer Wisch, distinguished itself by its exemplary aggressive spirit ..."

This fighting took everything the division had. SS-Sturmmann Gert Quarthammer of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie described these days from the viewpoint of a combat soldier of the SPW-Bataillon in a letter on 20 September 1944: "Things heated up again on the second day of Christmas. 'Withdrawal at Shitomir'. Those three words said it all. I never again want to be a part of such a retreat." The radioman in SS-Unterscharführer Schumann's Panther of the 4./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 described an operation which took place during this period:

Then our tanks assembled on the village road – about eight of them – and we moved out to the edge of the village. It was still black as pitch and only the large jets of flame ejected from our exhausts allowed some vision. Then a radio report reached us that a large number of T-34's were approaching. Shortly thereafter, our tank commander, Schumann, saw the first enemy tank and gave his gunner the angle and range. The gunner was so excited, however, that evidently he couldn't immediately find the pedal controlling the turret traversing gear. I wouldn't have given a plug nickel for my life then. Except for me and Schumann, this was the first time this crew had been in combat. Schumann had reason to get excited. Heavy firing began. Enemy tanks had broken into the sector in front of our antitank gun positions and a tank battle developed in this relatively small area. Friend and foe were quite close. In any case, there was no alternative to close-range combat given these visibility conditions.

Our Panthers and the Russian T-34's dodged around the terrain in every direction. The situation was pretty confused. I observed the terrain in front of me tensely through my periscope, the earphones over my ears. Suddenly I felt a particularly strong explosion and the tank shook. At first I didn't think anything of it, but then I saw the foreground light up from the glow of a fire that had to have come from the rear of our tank. What was going on? But then the driver yelled over to me: "Bail out! We're burning!" I tore off my earphones and tossed them to the left towards the radio. That action took off my cap; it fell to the deck of the compartment. Then I opened the hatch and climbed out. This all took place in a matter of seconds, and really I had never been in such a hurry to get out of the tank. I put distance between me and the tank at a dead run. Bullets and shells were swarming around me.

I had just hit the dirt about 100 meters away, when our tank blew up with a powerful explosion and a large jet of flame into the sky. The shells detonated as well and were exploding one after the other. Fearsome fireworks! Another tank was burning behind ours, and yet another somewhat further away. I worked my way through the terrain under a hail of iron, crawling and jumping, to get to Hauptsturmführer Poetschke's tank who, in spite of the shooting, was looking around outside the hatch with his body exposed down to the belt. His tank was firing continuously. I signaled him that I intended to take cover on his tank. He nodded his head and I rapidly climbed up forward on the track and sought shelter behind the turret on top of the engine compartment.

I found three other men there, two from our crew. I then saw several columns of fire on the battlefield, all burning brightly. I was afraid that they were mostly Panthers. Hauptsturmführer Poetschke continued to stand up in his hatch and give his fire commands. When we heard him say "Open fire!", we opened our mouths and put our fingers in our ears to protect our eardrums. Every time immediately after firing, there was a strong backblast and the tank rocked with the recoil, so that had anyone been standing up he would have been thrown from the tank. Gradually the firing died down and with the dawn it ceased altogether. On the battlefield - at least as much of it I could see - there were five destroyed T-34's and two Panthers, ours among them. Our Panther had its rear pointing toward the enemy. About 50 meters behind it, there was a burned out T-34, with its gun still aimed at our tank. It was the one which fired that fateful shot at Schumann's tank, but it had evidently been destroyed by one of our tanks immediately afterwards. 83

On the evening of 29 December 1943 the division took up

new positions in the line Polowezkolje – Ssolotwin – Kodnja. Starting at 1430 hours on 30 December 1943, the SPW-Bataillon was arrayed from the train station at Kodnja to the bridge 400 meters northwest of the railroad crossing. As the Russians were anticipated to attack Berditschew from the northeast, the Leibstandarte occupied the main battle line especially heavily at Ssolotwin. When an enemy infantry regiment and 18 T-34's attacked Ssolotwin at 0900 hours, seven T-34's managed to penetrate into the village at the sector boundary between the 14. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and the 3./ SS-Flak-Abteilung 1, and get behind the 8.8 cm battery. Other forces – among them tanks – attempted to overrun the battery from the front. The battery commander, SS-Obersturmführer Graul, had a small reserve which, together with the antiaircraft guns, regained control of this very threatening situation and destroyed two tanks.<sup>84</sup>

In another tank attack a group of Panzer IV's under SS-Untersturmführer Werner Sternebeck cost the Soviets every tank. SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Schäfer, commander of the 5. Kompanie, was wounded, and command of the company was later assumed by SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Streipart. A small group of armored vehicles pushed the Russians out of the train station at Kodnja and made it possible for the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 to occupy a security line. Kampfgruppe Scheler was attacked again that afternoon in Ssolotwin; among other units, the 14. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was involved. The Kampfgruppe was able to hold its ground after destroying 10 enemy tanks. The Soviets dug in front of the village. SS-Obersturmführer Rumpf's engineer company lost two men killed and four wounded in Ssolotwin. 85

SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling, former commander of the 13. (schwere) Panzer-Kompanie, was awarded the German Cross in Gold on this day. Since the middle of December he had commanded the Panzer regiment's II. Abteilung, and the 13. "Tiger" Kompanie was commanded by Michel Wittmann. 60 On that day the Leibstandarte received 320 men as replacements. During the night the SPW-Bataillon established contact with the 7. Panzer-Division on its left. On 31 December 1943 the division had to repel attacks along its entire sector and destroyed 25 tanks in the process. Adalbert Wichmann of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie described the integrated fighting of the grenadiers and the few tanks during those weeks:

At night, in extreme cold, we were placed in standby positions behind the infantry. During the night the Russians were working on a T-34 which lay behind their front lines. You could hear it from the repeated engine noise. Now and then you could see the ghostly outlines of hurrying Russians running about in the light of the flares. Eventually, the Russians attacked and our Landser called upon us, almost in desperation: "You tank heroes, why don't you shoot! Help us for God's sake! Why are you there, if you're not going to help us?" But what were we to shoot at? We couldn't identify any targets. As soon as flares went up, the enemy, camouflaged in snow smocks, disappeared. And because of the danger to our own people, we couldn't fire without specific targets. The situation improved during the day; Ivan attacked in the open. We fired with our 7.5 cm cannon. The fuses were set on the explosive shells so that the shells exploded after a delay. In direct, flat trajectory fire, the shells bounced off the ground at the same angle as the angle of impact and exploded over the heads of the attackers. The Russians hit the dirt and the attack was halted. Afterwards, we carried out a feint across the open field. A rifle bullet hitting the edge of the turret under my right arm caused me to rapidly dive back inside the turret. 87

On 31 December 1943 the SPW-Bataillon was attacked at 1030 hours from the north and northwest and, in close combat, abandoned the train station at Kodnja and pulled its lines back 600 meters to Pawliniwka – Point 225.6 – South Dworez. In the battalion, the commander of the 11. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt, and his platoon leader, SS-Hauptscharführer Max Leike, were awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, as were SS-Rottenführer Albert Stürmlinger and Hermann Feldmann in the 12. Kompanie. At 2200 hours the division occupied a new position along the line north edge of Berditschew – Kateriniwka – Gwasdawa – Trajanoff.

On 1 January 1944 the Panzergruppe had ten Panzer IV's and six Panthers fit for combat. At 0645 hours the Russians carried out an attack with eight tanks against the SPW-Bataillon's position along the Woliza – Trajanoff road. Right in front of the main lines the Panthers destroyed four tanks. In another attack the SPW-Bataillon's positions came under direct fire from two 15 cm assault guns, which cost casualties. The Panthers destroyed another four T-34's and the Russian attack against the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 bogged down 150 meters in front of the lines. Of the eight T-34's destroyed, the commander of the 2. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Malkomes, destroyed five himself. 88

A penetration at the northeast edge of Berditschew was pushed back by the employment of the Panzergruppe. When SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 moved to Bobrik, starting at 2200 hours, the II. Abteilung became the reaction force at Gorodischtsche. An Unterscharführer in the 6. Panzer-Kompanie described one of the typical small-unit actions during this period:

At the end of 1943/beginning of 1944 we were in a village and had laid down to sleep, wrapped in our anoraks, on the bare floor of a "living room" in a Russian house. Suddenly the company commander, Benoni Junker, burst in shouting, "In case you're interested, the Russians are just outside the entrance to the village!" At that time I was a gunner and two minutes later we were moving out. As our tank was the first vehicle in the garden of the house, we were the first to reach the road leading to the entrance to the village. We couldn't see anything yet, but the infantry was lying in the ditches beside the road, and showed us where things were happening. We came to a crossing which we sneaked up to cautiously. It presented us with an astonishing picture. Along with the monstrous noise and sounds of shooting, we could see the silhouette of a tank in the fog about 100 meters away. It was moving across our front then turning to fire on the German infantry in front of it with its machine gun. Our 7.5 cm cannon was loaded and I put the crosshairs on this shadowy tank. I only had the outline of its side in the sights, however. Our shot went off with a terrible noise. Missed! I started to sweat. Reload. Take a new sight picture; hold it somewhat lower. Fire. Direct hit! A relieved yell came from the infantry troops, who had seen death approaching them. 89

At dawn on 2 January 1944 two friendly Panzer IV's were destroyed by the 2./ SS-Flak-Abteilung 1 at Kateriniwka, after the engineers up front had signaled with smoke. The battery commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Kleemann, had to report to

Peiper, who questioned him sharply concerning the incident. Enemy pressure increased along the entire main battle line. At 1040 hours the SPW-Bataillon, with an attached Panther group, beat back an enemy attack on Gorodischtsche from the north, destroying two T-34's in the process. The entire battalion was in close combat at Rudnaja – Gorodischtsche. The commander of the 11. Kompanie and the commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmführer Schmidt and Dinse were wounded. SS-Sturmmann Jochen Molt of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie described the almost unimaginable exertions in the fighting of the past weeks, writing on 6 March 1944:

On the evening of 25 December the entire division was to move east through Shitomir into a new penetration area, east of the Shitomir – Berditschew Rollbahn. So we formed up with what remained of us – three sound vehicles, one officer, Tomhardt, two noncommissioned officers, Maicher and Klose, and ten men. There followed a week of extremely heavy defensive fighting and withdrawals. Mostly without any contact with supply, and always alone, since the Wehrmacht on the right and left had bailed out. We were in fox holes on New Year's Eve, and we were greeted the next morning – on New Year's Day – by eleven T-34's. Up to then, we hadn't had anyone killed, but now there were six wounded, two of them from frost bite. So on 1 January 1944, we were down to one SPW and seven men. Two SPW drivers had taken the other two SPW back to the trains.

On 2 January I was wounded by an antitank gun shrapnel. Our company was the immediate reserve. We put the SPW next to the wall of the house and made ourselves comfortable in the hut. The glutton that I am, I wanted to bring the ration box inside. I was standing outside on the tool box and got hit. Apparently, a T-34 had fired at our SPW. I don't know if our SPW was damaged. In any case there had been a huge noise. I had been penetrated through the right foot. The outer ankle bone had been shattered, the fibula broken, and everything in the leg was a mess.

SS-Obersturmführer Malkomes and his 2. Panther Kompanie made up the reserve in Gorodischtsche and was able to knock out five vehicles from the constantly attacking packs of red tanks. After very heavy, tank-supported attacks, the SPW-Bataillon had to pull back to the southern edge of Gorodischtsche. The entire division took up a new main battle line behind the Gnilopjat sector between Skragliwka and Olschanka. After crossing the Gnilopjat, the Panzer regiment sent all its tanks – there were just eight! – to the division at Pjatki. From 3 to 5 January there was a period of constant enemy attack and friendly counterattacks and the threat of being outflanked forced some units to withdraw. The Panzergruppe fought in Pjatki.

At the beginning of January SS-Untersturmführer Sternebeck and SS-Unterscharführer Wichmann of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie were heading for friendly lines with their tanks. After a halt, Sternebeck went on alone. Shortly after that, Wichmann's Panzer IV was attacked by two Soviet aircraft, whose bullets hit the engine compartment. A bomb landing behind the tank killed the radioman who was outside. Although the crew was able to extinguish the burning engine with snow, soon after it quit while climbing a slope. The tank commander reported:

Toward evening, things got hot. The crew sat on the tank with their gear, and the withdrawing Wehrmacht infantry asked us: "Do you really want to stay there?" Finally an assault gun came by with an Oberleutnant. Question: "What's wrong with you?" My answer: "Tank inoperable due to an air attack." Answer: "Where's the officer responsible for you? He really can't just leave you hanging there. The Russians are almost there. I can't tow you." The Oberleutnant let me and my crew mount his assault gun, destroyed my Panzer IV with a mercy round and took us with him to the rear.

It was a picture out of Dante's Inferno. Moving back among burning houses and bestial odors, smoke and destruction. Days later we found our units again. I was ordered to the regiment to report and soon found myself standing in front of Peiper. He was neither friendly nor upset, but only interested in the questions: Whether the tank could have been saved, what had been done to repair the tank, and when was the tank abandoned? And in the question of blame, who had ordered this unnecessary trip? They were penetrating questions which allowed no way to wriggle out. It was a matter of life or death. He neither raged nor raised his voice, but rather was coldly professional. It was my first personal encounter and you got a cold shiver down your back when you were sharply questioned by this man. 92

On 5 January1944 the XIII. Armee-Korps reported: "1. SS-Panzer-Division repulsed an attack in regimental strength on Mal. Tatarinowka and, with tank support, threw back to the north enemy forces which had penetrated Ratschki." On this day the Leibstandarte was reattached to the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps and occupied a position along the line east Demtschin – north Ratschki. The veteran commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, was severely wounded. SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie was also wounded and, as a last remaining son, was assigned to the officer reserve. He took over training replacements for the SPW-Bataillon in Winniza.

The companies of the SPW-Bataillon were in close combat in Ratschki. On 6 January 1944 the Panzergruppe was involved in armor fighting at Ratschki and destroyed five tanks. In the afternoon the division withdrew to Buraki - Selenyju farmstead point 267.7 - Dubrowka - Troschtscha. The neighbor on its left was the SS-Panzer Kampfgruppe "Das Reich", with the 20. Panzer-Division on its right. The few remaining tanks opened the way back south of Osadowka from 2000 to 2400 hours. The enemy intention was to capture Ratschki in order to break a hole in the army's front. The Soviets launched 60 to 80 tanks and a Rifle Corps against the Leibstandarte during its withdrawal. "Demtschin, Osadowka" were confirmed tank battle days for the 6. Panzer-Kompanie.95 SS-Untersturmführer Heinz "Bubi" Tomhardt commanded the severely depleted SPW-Bataillon. A radioman from the "Panther" Abteilung described the continuous tank actions during this period:

The villages changed, their names remained unknown to us, as were the objectives of our attacks. We had to carry out attacks practically every day which, although they gained no ground, held the enemy back. Because the Russians were able to penetrate our flanks again and again, we frequently had to pull back to rear positions in the evening or at night in order to make contact with the other units. Day after day passed in contact with the enemy, nights out in the open in severe cold, assigned to security duties. 96

On 7 January 1944, during reconnaissance of the main battle

line on Hill 276.7, Russians were found in the Januschpol area, when a T-34 destroyed SS-Untersturmführer Sander's SPW and Sander was wounded. At 0800 hours Panthers took Hill 276.7, destroying three T-34's in the process. The SPW-Bataillon then took up positions on that hill. In Sherepki the battalion was engaged in close combat. The Panzer regiment had 6 Panzer IVs, 11 Panthers, and 2 Tigers fit for service.

At midnight on 8 January 1944 the Leibstandarte's operations officer, SS-Obersturmbannführer Lehmann, was at Tomhardt's SPW-Bataillon command post at point 276.7. During the night Tomhardt had reported tank noise from the southwestern edge of Januschpol. The Panzergruppe in Ssmela was immediately alerted and moved forward to the south edge of Stepok. In the early morning – at 0515 hours – some 40 enemy tanks of the 54th Guards Tank Brigade with mounted infantry broke through the friendly main battle line at sector boundary between SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. The Russians reached the depression north of Stepok in the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 sector and Sherepki in the III. (gep.)/SS- Panzer Grenadier Regiment 2 sector.

SS-Untersturmführer Michael Wittmann and some of his Tigers were employed against the penetration in Sherepki. In the last few days there had been changes in his veteran crew. Because Wittmann's Tiger was out of action, he and Bobby Woll had moved to SS-Unterscharführer Sowa's tank - the driver SS-Sturmmann Eugen "Pan" Schmidt, the loader SS-Panzeroberschütze Werner Irrgang and radioman Sepp Rößner – and continued to operate with that crew. Wittmann moved at top speed at the head of his tanks to meet the enemy. Focused as always, he observed the terrain in front of him through the narrow slit in the commander's cupola. In previous fighting he had destroyed 56 enemy tanks and, with his gunner Balthasar Woll, in the last few weeks he had become the most successful tank commander in the division. With his usual assured calm, he gave the necessary orders to his crew. Woll had already had an antitank round loaded in the Tiger's breech. Eagerly, he kept searching for the enemy. Then they could hear the sound of fighting. Machine gun fire and the report of tank guns indicated proximity to the Soviets.

Suddenly Wittmann saw the enemy tanks and gave Woll through the intercom the position of the T-34 that he intended to hit first. The turret traversing gear quickly brought the gun in the desired direction. Woll tracked the T-34 through his optical sights, and hit it in the turret with his first shot. The turret was torn from the tank in a bright jet of flame. Direct hit! Then Wittmann had plenty of targets. Woll had already aimed at the next tank. His crosshairs were placed right at the base of the turret and he destroyed this tank with a direct hit as well - just before it could fire off a round. Wittmann took out three tanks and an assault gun. The lead elements of the enemy were rattled and the enemy attack was stopped for the time being. Then the enemy was hit by a pincers attack by the Panzergruppe of the Leibstandarte and destroyed. By 0900 hours this dangerous situation had been eliminated. Altogether 33 T-34's and 7 assault guns had been destroyed.97 Further attacks were stopped through the alert defense of the Panzergruppe, whose rapid counterattacks relentlessly shattered most enemy attacks before they got started. For example, the Panzergruppe was able to eliminate a penetration originating from Januschpol and supported by eight T-34's against the attached Kampfgruppe of the 208. Infanterie-Division in Podoroshnaja by 2300 hours.

General der Panzertruppe Balck, the commanding general of the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps, expressed special recognition and his best wishes to SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 for its success that day. Peiper's orderly officer, SS-Standartenoberjunker Köchlin, was attached to the 7. Panzer-Division with twelve tanks.

On 9 January 1944 the Soviets broke into the German positions with infantry and some 20 tanks and advanced as far as the northern section of Sherepki. There they were again met by SS-Untersturmführer Wittmann who destroyed six Soviet tanks and brought their attack to a halt. Wittmann had by then destroyed 66 enemy tanks. Starting at 2200 hours SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 occupied new positions northeast of Bespetschna. SS-Untersturmführer Dieter Kohler took over command of the SPW-Bataillon.

There was nothing new on 10 and 11 January. Eight Panzer IV's, eight Panthers and four Tigers represented the combat strength of the Panzer regiment, which had 7 officers, 29 noncommissioned officers and 140 men available. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 had an on-the-ground strength of 7 officers, 20 noncommissioned officers, and 174 men. On 10 January 1944 SS-Oberführer Wisch recommended Michael Wittmann for the Knight's Cross for his successes on 8 and 9 January 1944. (100) SS-War Reporter August Galle spoke to Wittmann on that day:

When we went looking for the blond officer from the Oberpfalz on this day – the day after he had destroyed his 66th enemy tank – our reception was somewhat noisy. A few meters in front of the entrance to the farmer's hut on the north edge of S., which sheltered the command post of the "Tiger" Kompanie, the Bolsheviks dropped a heavy caliber shell, one of those with which for some time it had been shelling the Tigers positioned among the abandoned houses. The concussion and rain of shrapnel from the explosion compelled us to move rapidly into the front room, where a medic quickly checked to see whether he had new work to do. Untersturmführer Wittmann wasn't unaccustomed to this sudden sort of entrance. It's not the first time that he has taken up positions just behind the infantry's fox holes in the main battle line.

Scarcely two kilometers away, black masses of Soviets have made themselves home in a small village. On the far slope there were artillery observers who followed every movement on our knoll. They were responsible for the unusual ventilation system in the room. On one side there was a gaping hole in the clay wall with only an emergency covering. An antitank shell went through there, just a few hours ago, broke a table leg and then continued on its way to the outside. As uninvited guests, some 80 Bolsheviks appeared last night. They had used a snow flurry for cover and infiltrated between the fox holes. With a handful of "Tiger" men, SS-Panzergrenadiere, and the soldiers in the command post, Michael Wittmann sent the Soviets back home with a bloody nose, at least those that didn't remain lying in his position. These small actions only gradually came out during the course of the conversation, which revealed a soldier's life stamped by the conditions of this war ...

As if he saw the images in front of his eyes, the successful "Tiger" commander described the sectors of the various opera-

tions. All the while the company commander traced the exploding shells by ear, while he, sometimes as if in thought, spoke hesitantly. It was concern for his men that kept him listening. After an impact a "Tiger" man burst into the front room to get his head bandaged. At that point, everything else was of secondary importance to Wittmann. The company commander sent the wounded man back to the aid station in his own vehicle, with precise instructions concerning the careful treatment of this shrapnel wound. His handshake in farewell, expressed an affection which this officer had for his men who had often dared the worst with him. Panzer comradeship! 101

In January 1944 the Panzer regiment received a quantity of new leather uniforms from naval supplies, black jackets and trousers. Some of them were still issued with gold buttons with anchors on them. The leather clothing was favored by the crews in the Leibstandarte, as it prevented tearing of the camouflage and winter overalls in the interior of the tank, held warmth and offered protection against burns.

On 12 January 1944 a Soviet tank attack on the friendly lines broke through and pushed forward to Ulanoff. SS-Untersturmführer Wittmann and SS-Oberscharführer Lötzsch of the 13. (schwere) Panzer-Kompanie destroyed three enemy tanks. At 0830 hours on 13 January strong enemy tank forces originating from the farmsteads at Chutorysko attacked the center of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1's sector. The pack of Soviet tanks broke through the main battle line and pushed forward to Tschessnowka. Once again, the commander of the 13. (schwere) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Michael Wittmann in Tiger "S04", threw himself against the enemy.

How often had Wittmann gone into combat with his equally legendary gunner, SS-Rottenführer Balthasar Woll? The small man from the Saarland with the lightning fast reflexes and his 8.8 cm gun was the ideal complement to the master tactician Wittmann. By 11 January 1944 Woll had already knocked out 61 tanks. With total concentration, Wittmann observed the terrain lying in front of him on this ice-cold January morning. His whitewashed Tiger soon reached Tschessnowka where the enemy tank penetration had been reported. Then Woll heard Wittmann's fire commands in his headphones. He immediately stepped on the traversing pedal and brought the gun into position. Woll adjusted the elevation a bit more. The first shot went whipping out immediately afterwards, which was a direct hit on the T-34. Wittmann's driver, SS-Sturmmann Eugen Schmidt, immediately put it in gear and continued to advance. Then Wittmann found the main body of the Russian tanks. Woll tracked T-34 after T-34 with his sights and fired continuously. His masterful precision blended shot and target into one. He pressed his forehead tightly against the optical sight and fired. Wittmann's Tiger dodged cleverly in front of the enemy tanks, only stopping to shoot. The Soviet tank penetration was shot to pieces. The Leibstandarte's small number of tanks destroyed 37 tanks and 7 assault guns. On this and the previous day Wittmann had destroyed another 19 tanks, which brought his total to 88. His gunner, SS-Rottenführer Woll, had put his sights on 80 of them.

On that same day, 13 January 1944, the divisional commander, Wisch, sent off a teletype recommending Wittmann for the Oak Leaves and Woll for the Knight's Cross. General Balck sent Wittmann a personal message by radio, expressing his con-

gratulations. <sup>102</sup> On 14 January 1944 the Wehrmacht Report stated: "SS-Untersturmführer Wittmann in a SS-Panzer-Division destroyed his 66th tank on the Eastern Front on 9 January 1944." <sup>103</sup> On 14 January 1944 Wittmann was awarded the Knight's Cross. SS-Sturmmann Walter Lau of the 13. "Tiger" Kompanie was present:

That day, we came back from the front with four or five Tigers under the command of Untersturmführer Wittmann and pulled into a village street to bivouac. Suddenly we had to form up on the village square, the usual square in front of a collective farm! Of the 20 to 25 men, a few had to stay behind for guard duty with the tanks. We stood relaxed in a semicircle when a fourwheel-drive staff car with the divisional commander pennant appeared on the opposite side of the square. It was our divisional commander, Oberführer Teddy Wisch. I was standing at the edge of the semicircle and at Wittmann's order had to go get the regimental commander, Sturmbannführer Peiper, who had his command post some 100 meters away in a Russian hut. I reported smartly to the Sturmbannführer that the divisional commander had arrived and was allowed to ride with him in his VW staff car to the village square. In the semicircle composed of his "Tiger" crews, Wittmann reported smartly to Wisch. A few words of praise from Wisch for Tiger crews in general and for Wittmann in particular. Then Wisch hung the Knight's Cross mounted on a long ribbon around Wittmann's neck. Hearty handshakes from Oberführer Wisch, Sturmbannführer Peiper, and all of us. That was it. Only a few minutes. The situation was critical, and the war continued remorselessly on its way without time for any real celebration. 104

At noon on 14 January 1944, as Lehmann describes in his divisional history, Peiper launched an attack with every operational tank and SPW and the II.(gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 1 from the area west of Ssmela on the farmstead at Chutorysko. He destroyed two enemy regiments there and pushed on through Krassnopol to Molotschki. Two T-34's, 20 antitank guns and numerous vehicles were destroyed. At 0345 hours on 15 January 1944 the lead tanks of the LAH were fighting on the highway south of Matrunki. At 1000 hours the corps ordered the Panzergruppen of the Leibstandarte and "Das Reich" to advance to Ljubar. However, the attack was halted beyond Stetkowzy by intense antitank gun and rocket fire and the tanks pulled back to Stetkowzy.

On 16 January1944 Wittmann's gunner, SS-Rottenführer Balthasar Woll, was decorated with the Knight's Cross. The LAH and "Das Reich" Panzergruppen carried out a feint to the northwest to tie down the Soviets in Ljubar. After that the Panzergruppe was returned to Leibstandarte control. The wounded SS-Panzerschütze Wolfgang Simon drove his Panther, considerably damaged by hits to the running gear, along with the radio operator who was also wounded, back through 15 kilometers of enemy territory. He steered with one hand. A recommendation for the inclusion of both men in the Army Honor Roll was disapproved. On 16 May 1944 Simon received the Iron Cross, 1st Class. 105 Edmund Martin, the radioman from SS-Unterscharfnhrer Valentine Bersin's Panther in the 3rd Kompanie, described his experiences during this period:

One morning the Russians attacked our lines and threatened infantry positions on the ridge of a hill. SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann ordered the employment of our tanks to support our

infantry who were fighting bravely. We went over to a counterattack and the infantry followed along, seeking cover behind the tanks. Soon enemy tanks appeared, and we became involved in a firefight on both sides. We took some T-34's in our sights which were in positions next to individual houses and which were firing steadily at us. But our tank was also discharging shell after shell out of the barrel of our cannon and Bersin managed to destroy two T-34's. Our other tanks were also enjoying this kind of success. Only broken by short intervals – which the loader needed to throw the empty shell casings out of his hatch and to ram a new shell into the breech – our tank shook under the force of the recoil from our rounds. Without regard to the rain of iron sent our way by enemy tanks and guns, we continued to push forward, stopping again and again to fire.

The enemy then pulled back and we reached the two burning T-34's which we had destroyed. It wasn't long before the enemy attempted a new advance, however. Evidently, they had received reinforcements, because their firepower had increased. We were running out of ammunition. For the first time in all our days of fighting we needed the shells which were in the racks immediately behind my back. I had a hard time getting it out of the rack and passing it back to the fighting compartment with the help of the loader. My hands were cut up and bleeding, but that was secondary at a time like this.

We saw impacting rounds all around our tank. Believing that these were antitank rounds, we pulled back a bit so as not to fall victim to them. The infantry, who had suffered heavy losses in the hail of shells, also fell back with us. A large number of these men dragged themselves toward the rear limping or with shattered arms. During this slow withdrawal an Unterscharführer jumped toward us and waved up at the turret. Bersin opened his hatch and looked out of the cupola to be able to hear the Unterscharführer. This man yelled at Bersin that the explosions were mainly from mortars, which were no danger to the tank. He evidently felt that the positions shouldn't be abandoned before the infantry had been able to withdraw and take their wounded with them. So we pushed forward again, but soon had to admit that the enemy firepower was superior and that any further advance would be suicide.

To our half right, Oberscharführer Joost's tank was slowly pulling back. But what was going on over there? To our horror, we saw flames shooting out of his engine compartment. Then I also heard Bersin's excited voice in the intercom: "Radio operator, transmit!" I quickly flipped the radio over from receive to send. "Bersin to Joost. Bersin to Joost. Your tank is on fire. Bail out now! Joost, your tank's on fire!" But at first, no one left the tank, where the crew evidently still had no idea that anything was wrong, as the tank continued to move back slowly. A few moments later someone left the turret, dropped to the ground, and jumped up. It was the commander, Oberscharführer Joost. He had barely got clear when the tank blew up, taking the lives of four of my comrades with it, including the gunner Eskuche. Joost came over to our tank. His face was distorted and he looked like death. His uniform was ripped, especially on the arm. He climbed onto our tank and sat on the engine cover. The infantry loaded a few more wounded onto our tank, among it a soldier whose leg was smashed and who was losing blood fast. 106

On 17 January 1944 a Panther group attacked Krassnopol,

destroyed five antitank guns and reached friendly lines without loss at 1000 hours. Jochen Peiper recommended the former commander of the 13. Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling, for the Knight's Cross. In fourteen weeks of combat, "John" Kling's "Tiger" Kompanie had destroyed 343 tanks, eight assault guns, 255 antitank guns, and 20 guns. Peiper underlined in his request: "Kling is an experienced, cool fighter and fully deserves the decoration for which he is recommended." Kling had destroyed 46 tanks. 107 For his successes on 28 and 29 December 1943, and for a total of 58 destroyed tanks, Peiper recommended SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Wendorff of the 13. Kompanie for the Knight's Cross.

On 18 January 1944 Jochen Peiper paid a visit to the Leibstandarte's most successful tank crew. By 13 January1944 SS-Untersturmführer Michel Wittmann, commander of the 13. (schwere) Panzer-Kompanie, had destroyed a total of 88 tanks, for which he received the Knight's Cross on 14 January 1944. His gunner, SS-Rottenführer Woll, received the Knight's Cross on 16 January1944. In Peiper's presence, SS-Oberführer Wisch presented the award to Woll on 18 January 1944. At the same time, the other members of Wittmann's crew, radio operator SS-Panzerschütze Sepp Rößner, loader SS-Panzeroberschütze Werner Irrgang and driver SS-Sturmmann Eugen Schmidt received both the Iron Cross, 1st and 2nd Class simultaneously. 108

Woll was the first gunner in the Waffen-SS to win this, the highest German decoration. He had destroyed 80 tanks and 107 antitank guns. He practiced a refined, individual technique, whereby he kept the range in his optics constantly set at 800 meters. Woll destroyed moving targets at 3000 meters range with delayed-action explosive shells. He frequently fired without fire commands from the commander. The Leibstandarte's 13. "Tiger" Kompanie was known in the entire division for its singular successes. The few Tigers that had been in combat during the period from 5 December 1943 to 17 January 1944 had destroyed 146 tanks and 125 antitank guns. 109

The master tank commander Michel Wittmann was also a sensitive, introspective and intelligent man who had his own thoughts concerning the course of the war: "I would be really happy if this genocide were finally over. I would certainly be one of the happiest men, if it was finally finished." <sup>110</sup>

From 19 to 21 January 1944, the Leibstandarte moved into the area of Chmelnik – Konstantinoff – Djakowzy – Sandraki, after it was relieved in place. The Panzer regiment had 25 Panzer IV's, 22 Panthers, and 1 Tiger fit for service. Thirty more tanks were in for repairs. There were also 25 assault guns and two 10.5 assault howitzers fit for combat, with seven in for repairs. SS-Standartenoberjunker Köchlin came back from his attachment to the 7. Panzer-Division without any operational tanks.

SS-Unterscharführer Hein Mück, the section leader for the main regimental radio station, described Peiper's ability, in spite of his normally serious nature, to have a sense of humor:

I had instructed my driver, Landfried, that since the regimental radio station was relatively far from the command post, to always be ready to bring arriving radio messages to the command post as rapidly as possible, once they were decoded. Naturally, Landfried immediately figured out how he could carry out this "irksome" task with the least possible effort.

Unexpectedly, he had gotten hold of a small Panje horse. I happened to be at the command post. Peiper, Jahn, and some others were also in the room when, through the window, we saw a wild rider on a shaggy Russian pony approaching the house.

Peiper to me: "Mück, is that guy one of yours?"

Me: "Jawohl, Sturmbannführer. He's my driver. He's evidently bringing a message."

Peiper's expression turned to stone. The door opened and Landfried, with the radio message in hand, entered and reported. The form showed signs of Landfried's wild ride and his not very well manicured hands. He was a great guy, but not exactly the model of a Prussian soldier. Peiper pounced like a hawk on the poor guy, who had really expected to be praised.

"How did you get that horse?"

Landfried, still with a happy grin: "I requisitioned it."

Peiper: "Are you crazy? How did you come up with that idea? Who gave you the order to do it?"

Landfried, who still hadn't really grasped the situation, replied proudly: "No one Sturmbannführer. I thought of it myself. Uscha. Mück told me that the radio messages are very important and the period between sender and receiver must be as short as possible. So, I thought that I should help out too as best I could, and since a horse is faster than I am, I got me one."

Even Peiper was unable to resist this unbelievably naive and sincere argument. He naturally saw through Landfried's explanation immediately, but he played along with it and with a small but mocking smile he then stated:

"OK, what you say is all very well, but that still doesn't give anyone the right to swipe a horse. Unless you are ordered to do so, requisitioning is no better than stealing. Return the nag immediately and, in the future, be sure to cover the distance on your own legs as rapidly as possible!"

Then to me, after Landfried had left: 'Mück, don't let that guy out of your sight for more than five minutes at a time!" 111

## **Operation Watutin: January 1944**

The Leibstandarte, which had been attached to the XXXXVI. Panzer-Korps effective 22 January 1944, was moved during a thaw and over muddy roads to the area north of Winniza by 24 January 1944. On 25 January it attacked south of Rotmistriwka with Kampfgruppe Kuhlmann and linked up with Bäke's heavy Panzer regiment. After overcoming bridging difficulties while crossing at Brizkoje, the Panzergruppe advanced to point 316.5. It destroyed 12 T-34's and four assault guns and, in spite of flanking fire from Otscheretnia, advanced into Ganowka in snow flurries in the gathering darkness and threw the Russians out of their positions.

On 26 January 1944 the Panzergruppe took Napadowka, where it advanced at top speed into the northern outskirts against exceptionally strong opposition. SS-Oberscharführer Hans Dauser's Panther (2. Kompanie) blocked the enemy from the bridge, which had been prepared for demolition. In spite of fire the mines could be removed, which allowed the Kampfgruppe to take Hill Position 293.3. This was a necessary prerequisite for the attack on Rossosche. For this act, the 35-year old Dauser, holder of the Blood Order, was recommended for the Knight's Cross. The SPW-Bataillon was in close com-

bat in Janowka.<sup>2</sup> The attack on Rossosche was hindered by massed antitank gun and artillery fire, whereupon the Panzer IV's tied down the enemy while the Panthers moved around the village and, in spite of poor visibility and bridge conditions, broke into it from the west in a night attack.

SS-Sturmbannführer Horst Finzelberg, who had just joined the Panzer regiment, participated in this attack. He had been with the 6. SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord" on the northern front and had recently commanded the SS instructional battalion for armor noncommissioned officers. In spite of a wound and other sickness, he volunteered to go back to the front. On 26 January 1944 Finzelberg participated in the attack on Napadowka and Rossosche in Peiper's tank "055" with Peiper's crew: driver, SS-Unterscharführer Otto Becker; 1st radio operator, SS-Sturmmann Horst Schumann, 2nd radio operator, SS-Sturmmann Heini Kiel and gunner, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn. After moving a short distance, Peiper's tank was hit. Schumann recalled:

We were hit in the left rear by an 8.8 antiaircraft gun, probably captured by the Russians, at least as far as the men at the repair facility were concerned. Jochen Peiper was very annoyed. He had insisted we bring up the rear. That, however, was our undoing. Finzelberg and Heini Kiel were killed immediately. Helmut Jahn got out of his hatch as fast as lightning, with a tear in the left arm of his jacket. He had to run after the tank which was still moving forward, something that really puzzled Otto Becker and me. We thought he was still in the tank. The shell had gone through Finzelberg's lower back and he was killed instantly. Heini Kiel sat behind me with a shattered skull. I myself had a piece of shrapnel in my right lower jaw, and I had also lost a tooth, which I didn't notice at first. When it began to fester after a few days, Obersturmführer Jahn sent me to the main aid station and, after a short operation, I was sent back to the field hospital at Winniza. 3

On 27 January 1944 Kampfgruppe Kuhlmann took the train station at Lipowez at 0530 hours and the crossroads to its north, but then the tanks could go no further for lack of fuel and ammunition. All by himself, SS-Untersturmführer Michael Wittmann destroyed a total of 22 Russian tanks between 0900 and 1100 hours. This brought his total score to 114. With this, he became the first German tank commander to destroy more than 100 enemy tanks. <sup>4</sup>

Enemy tanks and infantry attacked Lipowez and Rossosche, where the SPW-Bataillon was involved in close-quarters combat, but were repelled. At 0400 hours in the morning on 28 January 1944 Wittmann destroyed another three tanks.<sup>5</sup> At 0915 hours a fuel column reached Rossosche, which had been escorted by Bäke's heavy Panzer regiment. Oberstleutnant Dr. Bäke attacked to the east south of Rossosche. After taking on supplies, Panzergruppe Kuhlmann moved along the railroad line which went through Babin to Morosowka at 1300 hours. It took Babin and Neminka on the following day. On 29 January 1944 the SPW-Bataillon advanced into Morosowka.6 During Kampfgruppe Kuhlmann's attacks from 25 to 29 January 1944, it destroyed 116 tanks, 89 antitank guns, and 11 guns. For this success achieved by his Panzergruppe, SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann received the Knight's Cross on 13 February 1944. 7

The unshakable morale and the invisible but all-encompass-

ing bonds between officers and men in the Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment was again reflected in this statement by their most successful tank commander, Michael Wittmann: "At the moment of the hardest fighting, which would soon be over, I didn't want to leave my company, my men, alone, because they had such great confidence in me ... They would go to Hell with me and I with them." <sup>8</sup>

On 30 January 1944 the Iron Cross, 1st Class was awarded to: tank commander SS-Unterscharführer Alfons Paßler (3. Kompanie); tank commander Unterscharführer Harald Stein (7. Kompanie); and SS-Oberscharführer Hans Dauser and SS-Unterscharführer Josef Bobach (formerly Dr. Ley's adjutant)(both of the 2. Kompanie). The Iron Cross, 2nd Class was awarded to 62 other tankers. During January 1944 the personnel of tanks out of action were organized into a field training company in each of the two tank battalions. The one for the I. Abteilung was commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke in Koristowa, the one for the II. Abteilung was commanded by SS-Untersturmführer Sternebeck in Balkowzy. Those officers in the officer reserve, including Torns and Reiser and the SS-Hauptscharführer Heubeck, Koch and Ibenthal were also in Koristowa.

Gert Quarthammer, who was an SS-Sturmmann at the time, made the following observation from the viewpoint of the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 which consisted of one SPW at that point:

We were in positions from 15 to 26 January 1944. The company was four men strong: Wistler, Fritsche, Jentzsch, and me. That was the 13. Kompanie. The battalion was still 24 men strong. I was the main runner at the battalion command post ... we were in positions for about 15 days in that situation. Then we were relieved by the army. They brought in 120 men where we had held a front 1800 meters long with 24 men. After 3 days rest, we moved out again. No one knew where ... We were replenished with personnel and partially refitted, and now we had two SPW with 15 men. After the Russians had been surrounded – it was before the liberation of Tscherkassy – the shooting began. The Russians had no idea of what to do. After seven days, the pocket was torn open and destroyed. 11

#### The Oak Leaves for Peiper

On 27 January 1944 Jochen Peiper was awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross. He received the following telegram from Adolf Hitler: "In grateful recognition of your heroic actions in fighting for the future of our people, I award you the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross as the 377th soldier of the German Wehrmacht to win this distinction. Adolf Hitler."

On 30 January 1944, the day of his 29th birthday, Peiper was promoted to SS-Obersturmbannführer. He received orders to report to Führer Headquarters to receive his award of the Oak Leaves. A few days later, he stood in front of Adolf Hitler in the Wolfsschanze in Rastenburg. The Führer presented him with the Oak Leaves and spent some time in detailed conversation with the commander of his division's Panzer regiment. Jochen Peiper presented Hitler with a sober and dispassionate description of the critical state of the Eastern Front as he had experienced it and described the intensive combat in which the Panzer regiment was engaged against a strong enemy.

Following that, Peiper started his leave and visited his family who, because of the terror bombing, had already left Berlin a few months before and had been living in Bavaria since 7 November 1943. They had taken up their new residence in a large villa in Rottach-Egern on Lake Tegern, the Gsotthaberhof Villa at Wolfgruberstraße 177. The Reichsführer SS, who lived in nearby Gmund, had helped them with getting this residence. The family of the commander of the 12. SS-Panzer-Division "Hitlerjugend", Fritz Witt, also lived in the beautifully situated Rottach-Egern. Witt had been the commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 of the LAH up until the Battle of Kharkov. SS-Obersturmbannführer Werner Grothmann, Himmler's adjutant, who had been bombed out in Berlin also lived there. Sigurd Peiper and the two children, Elke and Hinrich, only occupied a few rooms on the third floor of the house belonging to the Jewish Nathan family. The large building was filled. Along with Peiper's family, a family by the name of von Podewil lived there along with the many members of the Nathan family. The owner of the house, Nathan, who was employed by the Dresdner Bank, also lived there. <sup>1</sup>

Jochen Peiper was finally back home for the first time since the summer of 1943 and used the days to recover with his family in the quiet of Lake Tegern. The mountains were covered with white snow, and the Peiper family passed peaceful days with their seldom seen father in the Bavarian winter. Physically, Peiper was in poor condition; he looked tired and burned out. This time at home seemed to be a dream in comparison to the snowy wastes of Russia with their continuously threatening dangers, cold, death and filth. His wife Sigurd was near delivery. His promotion to SS-Obersturmbannführer didn't reach him until he was home.

The German press reported his award of the Oak Leaves in the first days of February 1944. The Völkische Beobachter wrote on 3 February 1944:

On 27 January 1944 the Führer awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross to SS-Sturmbannführer Joachim Peiper, commander of the Panzer regiment of the SS-Panzer-Division Leibstandarte SS "Adolf Hitler". He was the 377th soldier of the Wehrmacht to be so distinguished.

SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper had forced a breakthrough through the main enemy lines east of Shitomir with his Panzergruppe and, on his own initiative, exploiting this success, had smashed deeply into the enemy positions. In this attack, he was able to ferret out the divisional staffs of four enemy divisions and destroy enemy batteries and Pakfronten in his furious advance. By this thrust 30 kilometers deep behind the enemy, the enemy front in this area was shaken and our own advance made possible. In this fighting, his regiment destroyed a total of 100 tanks and 76 antitank guns, as well as other equipment, and inflicted heavy, bloody losses on the enemy ...

On 11 and 12 February, Peiper underwent a medical examination at the Waffen-SS Health and Fitness Center at Dachau, in order to find out the cause for his continuous fatigue. It was finally determined that he had a natural inclination to low blood pressure which in combination with his exhaustion had led to circulatory problems and to a tendency to pass out. Peiper explained: "When I bent over and then straightened back up, I blacked out. It also happened when I was climbing stairs. My arms and legs frequently went to sleep." These symptoms were

not known within his unit. The doctor determined: "Peiper went into action with little physical effort pretty much on pure coffee, etc., while during rest periods, he suffered reactions in the form of renewed weakness." Peiper had been suffering from this fatigue problem since 1941 and had not taken advantage of a nine months leave which had been arranged for him. The doctor noted: "For Peiper, who at the time appeared completely worn out, a long convalescent leave was very appropriate. Peiper, however, adamantly refused any extension of his leave." He had still not recovered from his nervous exhaustion after the first two weeks of his three weeks leave.

On the basis of this diagnosis, his leave was extended and he finally let himself be convinced, but only after energetic remonstrance on the part of the doctors, that in his condition he was not fit to go back to the front. It is known that he did not return to the Eastern Front in 1944. The claim in various publications that Peiper participated in the Leibstandarte's operations along the edge of the Tcherkassy pocket in February 1944 and in the Hube pocket in April 1944 are errors. He was never there.

On 7 March 1944 Frau Peiper brought her daughter Silke into the world at Lake Tegern. Peiper now had three children: Elke, Hinrich, and Silke.<sup>6</sup> Peiper was in Berlin in April 1944 and, among others, met with Reichsminister Dr. Josef Goebbels. During the conversation Peiper asked him whether he believed that the war could still be won. In a detailed appreciation of the situation, Goebbels explained that Germany was in a bad position militarily, but that he hoped for dissension among the allied ranks and expected a break between the Americans and the Soviets. In order to give the government a chance to exploit this, the front had to be stabilized and held. <sup>7</sup>

# SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Action Without Peiper: February to April 1944

During Peiper's absence the Leibstandarte was in action during February 1944 on the edge of the Tcherkassy pocket in order to relieve the units surrounded there and trying to break out. The severely reduced Panzergruppe was commanded by SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann. On 17 February 1944 the surrounded divisions were able to force their way out, taking heavy casualties. Completely fought out and exhausted grenadiers of the "Wiking" reached the positions of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 north of Lissjanka on that day.

Shortly after Peiper, Michael Wittmann was awarded the Oak Leaves on 30 January 1944, 16 days after winning the Knight's Cross. His total had reached 117 destroyed enemy tanks. He received orders to present himself at the Führer Headquarters. His friend, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut "Axel" Wendorff, who received the Knight's Cross on 12 February 1944, took over command of the "Tiger" Kompanie. On 23 February he wrote Wittmann:

Now they've hung the "tin necktie" around my neck too, and I also got Obersturmführer ... I am leading the proud 13. Kompanie until you get back, but to my great sorrow it's now only a shambles ... When I went forward, I found three Tigers, two of which broke down again right away, so there was no question of killing tanks with them. \(^1\)

On 23 February 1944, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling, the former commander of the 13. "Tiger" Kompanie, was awarded

the Knight's Cross. The commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl, was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 30 December 1943. After he was wounded and lost his right eye on 5 December 1943, and after his convalescent leave from 22 January to 15 February 1944, he was once more fit for duty. He got himself glass eyes in Berlin and took over command of the SPW-Bataillon again on 2 March 1944.<sup>2</sup>

In the Leibstandarte's daily report for 7 February 1944 the following was stated about the SPW-Bataillon: "as a result of the loss of all its vehicles it was now only fit for combat as infantry." On 13 February 1944 the battalion had only 2 light machine guns, one sub machine gun, five pistols and four rifles at its disposal. The remnants of the SPW-Bataillon had gone into action for the relief of Tcherkassy under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß. SS-Sturmmann Gert Quarthammer of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie described the action at this time in a letter from the field: <sup>3</sup>

At night the battalion moved out. We had only six SPW left. Water came down from the sky in buckets. We could only make slow progress. By morning two SPW had broken down. We could hardly make it through the mud. Then we had bad luck. In three hours our track broke eight times ... the next morning, Preuß had the battalion assemble – 14 men – and gave Krebs the command. Preuß himself went back with the remaining vehicles and we had to tramp on ... On the way, we passed trucks and even Tigers stuck in the mud.

SS-Unterscharführer Jupp Krebs of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie commanded the battalion Kampfgruppe during the Tcherkassy operation. On 9 March 1944 the battalion consisted of one officer, four noncommissioned officers and 17 men – less than a platoon. The officers and men of the Panzer regiment hadn't developed much trust in the regimental commander Kuhlmann and longed for Peiper's return, which is evident from a letter by the commander of the "Tiger" Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Wendorff, sent on 23 February 1944: "I have only one wish, and this is that the regimental commander comes back soon."

Because of the losses in both men and materiel due to continuous combat, the Leibstandarte could only be regarded as a divisional Kampfgruppe. When it moved into the Proskurow sector in the final days of February 1944, SS-Untersturmführer Fischer, first orderly officer of the Panzer regiment, had to blow up some 30 armored vehicles in Talnoje, because there were no rail cars and the Soviets were already getting close.<sup>5</sup> The Leibstandarte had reached the Proskurow sector by 3 March 1944. On 5 March 1944 10 new Tigers were delivered, with which SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Wendorff achieved further victories. He personally scored his 68th knocked out enemy tank by April 1944.<sup>6</sup>

After Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann's heart attack on 9 March 1944, SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke took over command of the LSSAH Panzergruppe – as it was then officially designated – as there could no longer be any talk of a Panzer regiment or even a battalion. On 14 March 1944 the Panzergruppe had a combat strength of 4 officers, 4 noncommissioned officers and 25 men.

Starting 23 March 1944 the Leibstandarte found itself in the 1. Panzer-Armee pocket – the Hube pocket – moving toward

the west. Those elements of the SPW-Bataillon not fighting in the pocket were in Winniza, where SS-Untersturmführer Gührs was in charge of training.<sup>7</sup> There were also some 150 men of the Panzer regiment there without tanks.8 The remainder of the 14. Kompanie of the SPW-Bataillon, under the command of SS-Hauptscharführer Haferstroh, was in Stanislau, where some men were detached to form a Kampfgruppe and others were sent to a noncommissioned officer course in Debica. A contingent from the SPW-Bataillon flew from Reichshof to Berlin and picked up eight SPW in Spandau and brought them by rail to Tarnopol.9 SS-Untersturmführer von Bergmann of the 14. Kompanie had received the mission to pick up two Grillen in Tarnopol. When he arrived at the railroad station there, there were four Grillen on the train. Making a quick decision, he took those too, so that when the company was refitted in Flanders it had a total of six Grillen. 10 The Leibstandarte's Kampfgruppen, which had been burned into ashes long ago, were continuously in defensive combat.

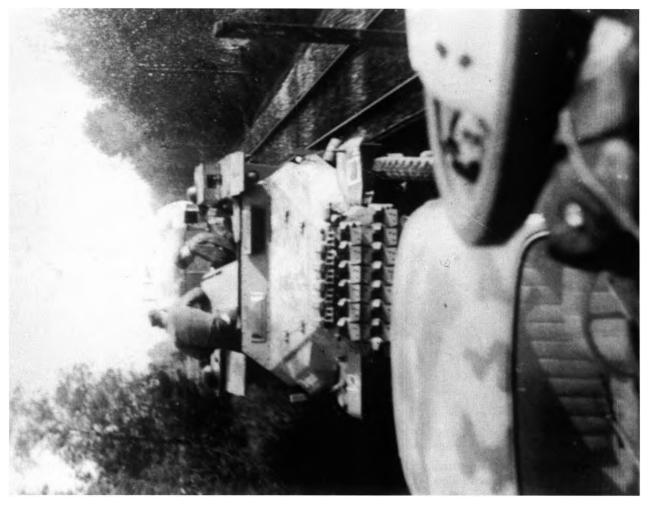
At the beginning of April 1944 the Leibstandarte's small Panzergruppe was able to gain a significant victory, which played a major role in breaking out of the pocket. On the afternoon of 1 April 1944 the Panzergruppe, led by SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, attacked Dawidkowce after an attack by the 19. Panzer-Division that morning in heavily blowing snow along the Dawidkowce - Losiacz road had bogged down because of massive enemy resistance and the exhaustion of its grenadiers from uninterrupted combat. Dawidkowce was a strong barrier in front of the crossing over the Niczlawa River. After providing cover against enemy pressure from the forest south of the road with the Kampfgruppe of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, Poetschke's weak Panzergruppe and the Kampfgruppe of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 – 2 Panthers and 40 grenadiers – managed to penetrate into the eastern outskirts of the village in hard house-tohouse fighting. The attack bogged down, however, in the face of a stubborn Soviet defense.

One tank and many grenadiers dropped out. But Poetschke didn't give up. He disengaged his Kampfgruppe, by-passed Dawidkowce to the north and towards 0400 hours on the morning of 2 April 1944 made a surprise advance into the village from the northwest. He pushed all the way into the southern outskirts. At the end, Poetschke was fighting with only his command Panther and 10 grenadiers, but his surprise attack had caused such panic among the Soviets that they fled from the village, leaving behind considerable materiel. By taking Dawidkowce, Poetschke had made it possible for the 1. Panzer-Armee to cross the Niczlawa. The commanding general, Walter Nehring, gave recognition to Poetschke's accomplishment in hand written correspondence.

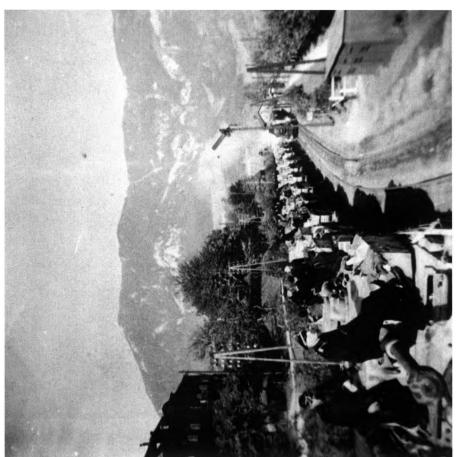
On 12 April 1944 the Leibstandarte made contact at Sloboda – Dzurygka with the 10. SS-Panzer-Division "Frundsberg", arriving from the west to relieve it. On 14 April 1944 the completely exhausted LAH Kampfgruppe was relieved and was sent by rail to Belgium for reorganization.

In the period between November 1943 and March 1944 the men of the LAH's SPW-Bataillon had participated in the following days of close combat, which were officially recognized for the award of the Nahkampfspange:

17 November 1943	Lutschin	14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
18 November 1943	Lutschin	14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
19 November 1943	Hill 176.9	14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
22 November 1943	Jastrebenka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
23 November 1943	Dubrowka, Lasarowka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
24 November 1943	Starizkoje	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
27 November 1943	Bulytschety (Recon)	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
28 November 1943	Garboroff	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
29 November 1943	Tolstoje	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
5 December 1943	Andrejew	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
6 December 1943	Kaitanowka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
7 December 1943	Chodory	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
8 December 1943	Kotowka, Sabolot	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
9 December 1943	Meshiritschka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
10 December 1943	Hill 154.2	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
11 December 1943	Krasnoborki,	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
12 December 1943	Wel. Ratscha	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
14 December 1943	Iskra	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
15 December 1943	Hill 179.6	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
19 December 1943	Baljarka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
20 December 1943	Tschepowitschi	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
21 December 1943	Ossefowka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
26 December 1943	Woliza	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
27 December 1943	Staraja Kotelnja	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
28 December 1943	North of Staraja Kotelnja	
29 December 1943	Woroschino	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
31 December 1943	Kodnja	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
1 January 1944	Trojanoff	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
2 January 1944	Rudnaja Gorodischtsche	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
5 January 1944	Ratschki	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
7 January 1944	Sherepki	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
8 January 1944	Sherepki – Pewna	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
25 January 1944	Rotmistriwka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
26 January 1944	Janowka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
27 January 1944	Rossosche	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
29 January 1944	Morosowka	Staff (III.), 11., 12., 13. and 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
5 March 1944	Basalia	Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
8 March 1944	Kupel	Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
9 March 1944	Manatschin	Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
10 March 1944	Losowa	Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2  Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
11 March 1944	Woitowzy	Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2  Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
13 March 1944	Swalijk	Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2  Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
23 March 1944	Kretschana	Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2  Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2
29 March 1944	Andrejewka	Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2  Kampfgruppe III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2



Company commander's tank of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 with Olenik and SS-Obersturmführer Scharke.



SPW of the 14. Panzer-Pionier-Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 on the train to Russia towards the end of October 1943.



SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt, commander of the 11. (gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, on the left in the trench with his platoon leader, SS-Hauptscharführer Max Leike. SS-Rottenführer Pflaume in the rear. (November 1943).



Veteran frontline soldiers of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. In front: SS-Hauptscharführer Max Leike and SS-Rottenführer Pflaume.



November 1943 on the Eastern Front in the Brusilow sector. From left to right: SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs (commander of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie), SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff (adjutant) and SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Sander (platoon leader in the 11. (gep.) Kompanie.



SS-Unterscharführer Harold Weiß and SS-Unterscharführer Otto Becker of the regimental staff of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Becker was Peiper's tank driver; Weiß was killed in action in November 1943.



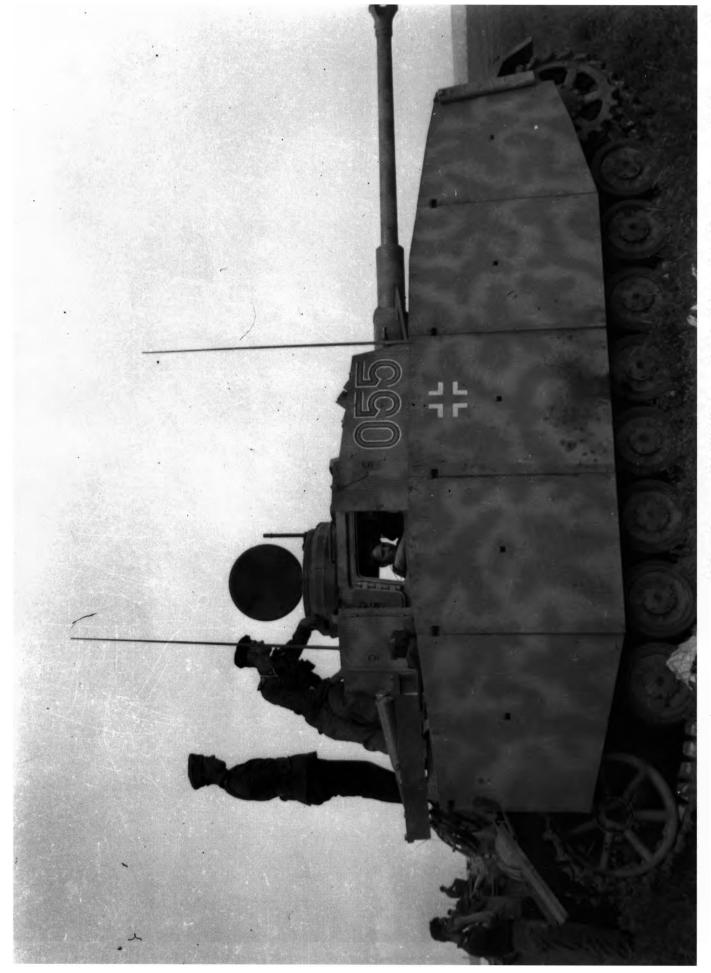
Supply elements of the SPW-Bataillon in Russian mud.



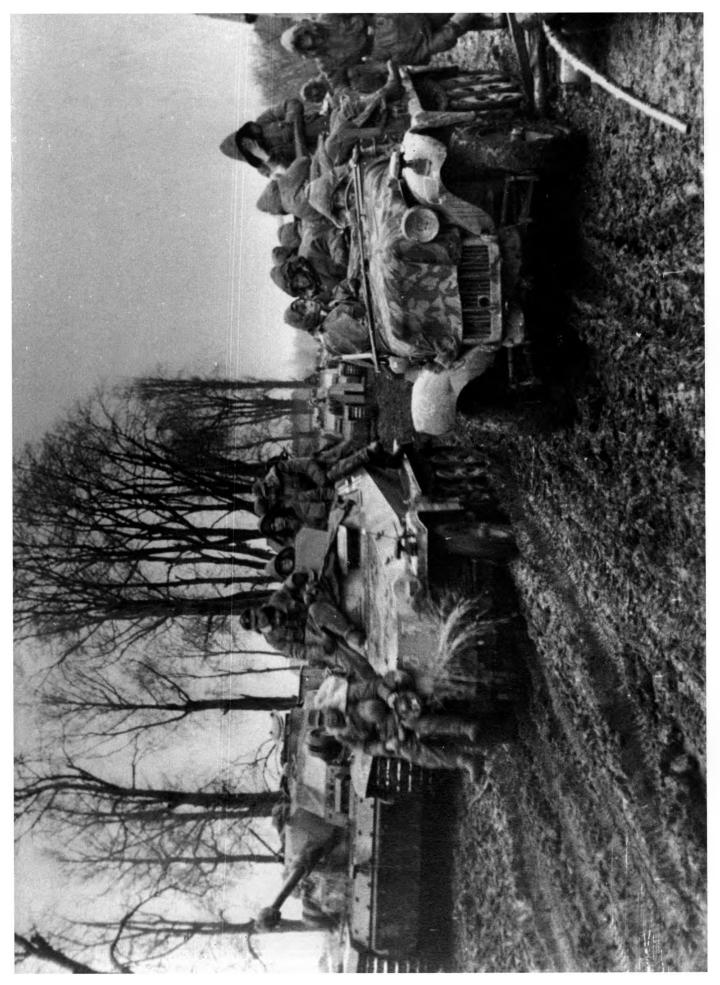
SPW of the 14. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in November 1943 in the Fastow area.



On 20 November 1943 SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper assumed command of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 of the Leibstandarte.



Panzer IV "055", the commander's tank, which Peiper took over in November 1943. SS-Sturmmann Heini Kiel (in the turret hatch) and SS-Unterscharführer Hans Fring (on the left). Both rode with Peiper as voice and continuous wave radio operators.





Peiper's adjutant in the SPW-Bataillon, Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, was severely wounded on 23 November 1943.



SS-Sturmbannführer Martin Groß led the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



 $SS-Sturmbannf \"uhrer\ Herbert\ Kuhlmann\ (here\ as\ a\ SS-Hauptsturmf \ddotuhrer)\\ led\ the\ I.(Panther)/SS-Panzer-Regiment\ 1\ of\ the\ Leibstandarte.$ 



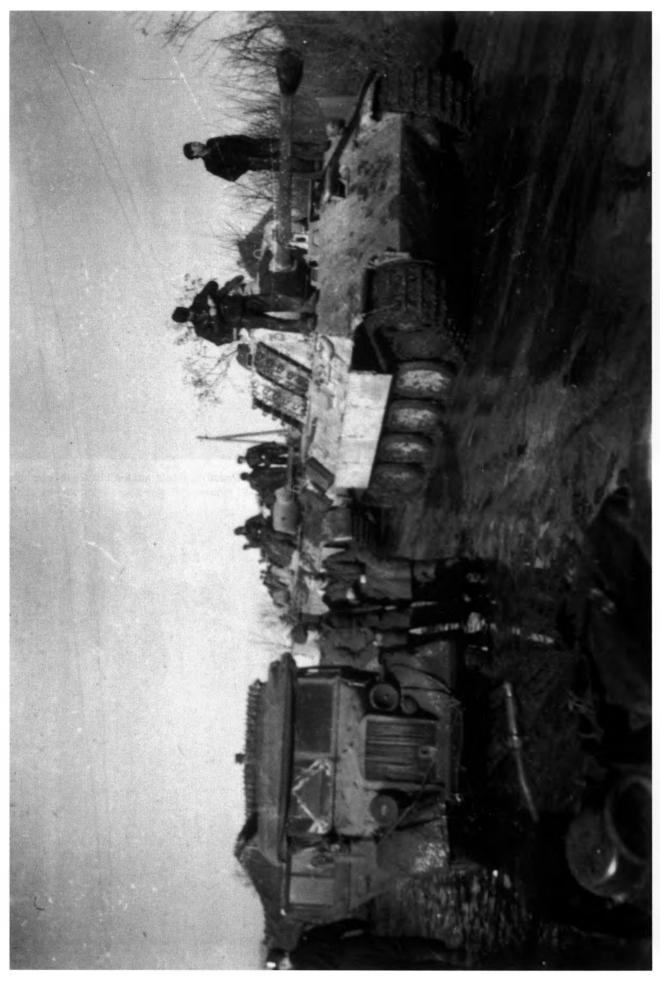
SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl assumed command of the III. (gep.) SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. from Peiper on 20 November 1943.

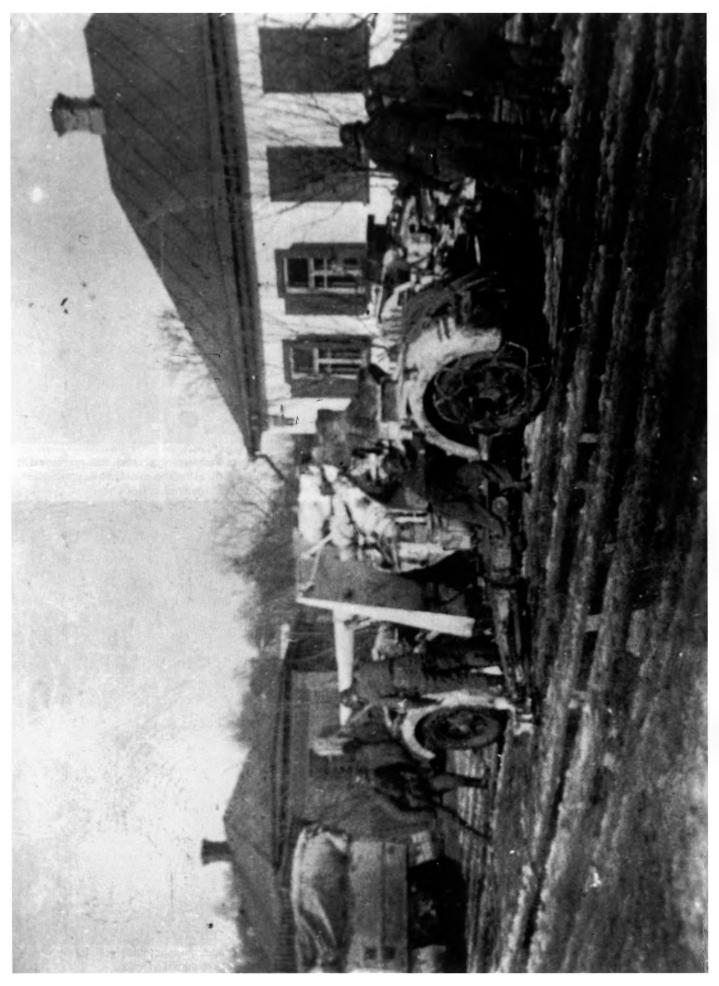


SS-Unterscharführer Valentin Bersin in front of Panther "319" of the 3. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 at Kotscherwo in December 1943.



Tiger "S45" of the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 churns through the Russian mud.







SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn, regimental signals officer of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and gunner in Peiper's command tank.



SS-Rottenführer Adalbert Wichmann, gunner and tank commander in the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, in the Shitomir sector, next to his tank.



SS-Obersturmführer Rudi Mäule, the regimental maintenance officer, and SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn, the regimental signals officer, of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in front of a radio truck of the main signals station. Left: a Kfz. 69 of the radio section.



SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse was Peiper's adjutant during the Kharkov operation. Later, he became the commander of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie. On 6 December 1943 he assumed command of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Nüske, Peiper's adjutant in SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in the winter of 1943/44.



The main radio station (with extended antenna) of the Panzer regiment in December 1943.



SS-Oberscharführer and officer candidate Joachim Fabig, platoon leader of the 8./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, who was killed in action on 14 December 1943 at Iskru (pictured in 1942).



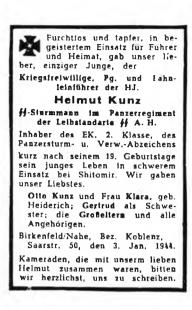
SS-Sturmmann Karl-Heinz Warmbrunn on 22 November 1943, after he had knocked out his 42nd tank as a gunner in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Obersturmführer Hans Stübing commanded the 2. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Sturmmann Helmut Kunz, gunner in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, died on 25 November 1943 at Popielnja as a result of wounds received at Brusilow on 21 November 1943.



Death notice for SS-Sturmann Helmut Kunz.



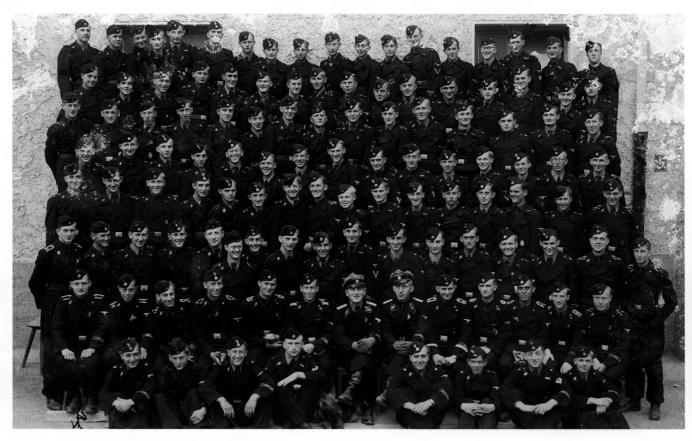
SS-Unterscharführer Alfred Benick of the 12. (gep.) /SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



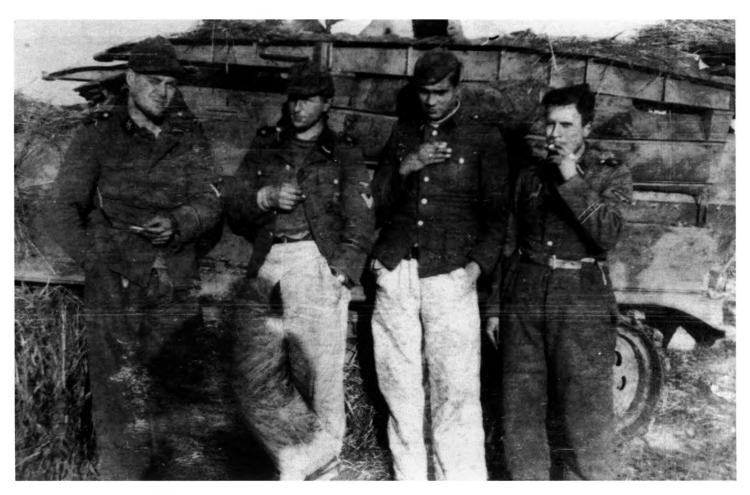
Prime movers of the recovery section of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



Officers and noncommissioned officers of the 3. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. First row (bottom, from left): SS-Oberscharführer Karl Raquet, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, SS-Obersturmführer Karl Kleist, SS-Untersturmführer Friedl Tibcke and SS-Unterscharfuhrer Karl Joost. Second Row: SS-Unterscharführer Karl-Georg Bennewitz, SS-Unterscharführer. Hermann Albrecht, SS-Hauptscharführer Weyer, Hauptscharführer Hans Krechmann, SS-Oberscharführer Otto Rietschel, SS-Oberscharführer Walter Robock, SS-Unterscharführer Schnabel. The two back rows: SS-Unterscharführer Weißbach, SS-Unterscharführer Valentin Bersin, SS-Unterscharführer Ambros, Unterscharführer Pospich, Unterscharführer Becker, unknown , Unterscharführer Mothes, Unterscharführer Willy von Chamier, three unknown Unterscharführer, Unterscharführer Amenda, Unterscharführer Will.



The 2. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 with SS-Obersturmführer Hans Stübing in the center, second row from the bottom. Next to him on the right is Jupp Bosbach; third from the right, SS-Unterscharführer Hans Dauser, fourth from the right, SS-Hauptscharführer Konrad Heubeck. The latter two were later awarded the Knight's Cross.

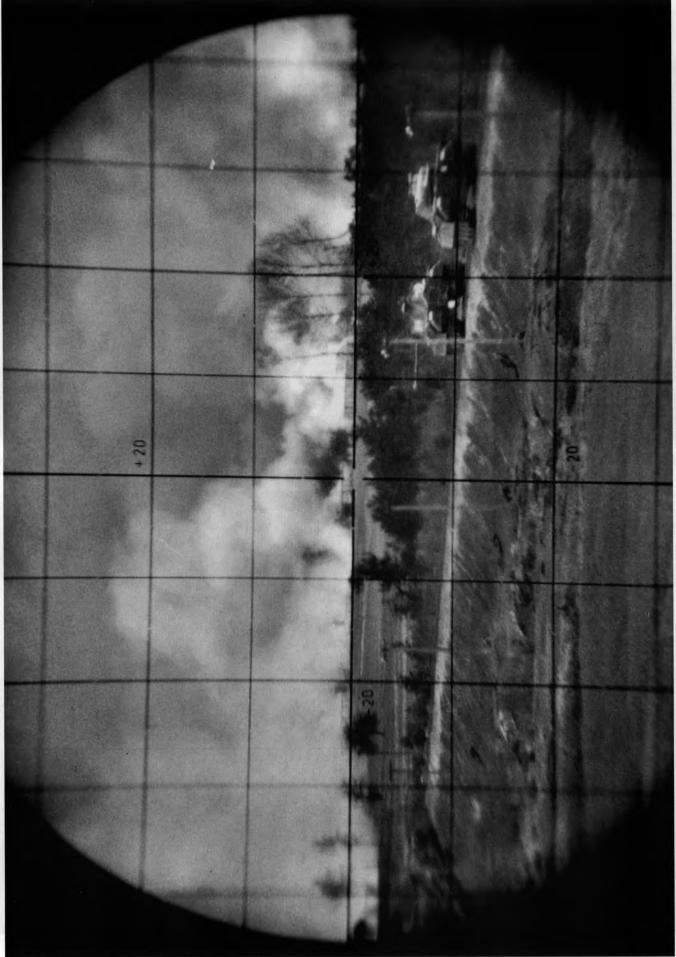


Combat engineers of the 14. Panzerpionier-Kompanie of the SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. From the left: SS-Sturmmann Braunroth, unknown , SS-Pionier Bernhard Hasenkampf and unknown in front of their SPW.



SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Scharke, Mehling, Hans Oeser, Emil Frieb (gunner) and Karl Wisura of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.

Photographed through the sights.





Officers of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1: SS-Unterscharführer Franz Domes, SS-Obersturmführer Walter Malchow (company commander), SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Schäfer (later commander of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1) and SS-Unterscharführer Hans Rattenhuber.



SS-Oberscharführer Hans Frings, who served as the temporary continuous wave operator in November and December 1943 in Peiper's tank. He led the main radio station of the Panzer Regiment.



Men of the signals platoon of the Panzer Regiment: SS-Sturmmann Eberhardt, SS-Sturmmann Ebeling, SS-Unterscharführer Helmut "Hein" Mück (who occasionally served in Peiper's tank as a continuous wave radio operator in November/December 1943) and SS-Sturmmann Wilhelm Nußhag.



Panzergrenadiere of the Leibstandarte in the winter of 1944.



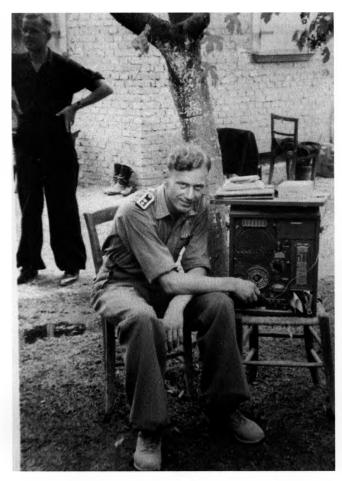
In the winter of 1943/44, he became the most successful tank commander of the Leibstandarte – SS-Untersturmführer Michael Wittmann, platoon leader and company commander in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment. He was awarded the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords.



SS-Rottenführer Fritz Thier of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 until he was wounded in Normandy on 8 August 1944. He held the Iron Cross, 2nd Class, the Nahkampfspange in silver, the Panzerkampfabzeichen in bronze, the Crimea Shield, among other awards.



Panthers of the I. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Oberscharführer Walter Brandstäter, tank commander in the 8./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. He was severely wounded in November 1943; he received the Iron Cross, 1st Class on 15 March 1944. On the left, SS-Obersturmführer Herbert Sprunk, commander of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, killed in action on 8 December 1943.



SS-Sturmmann Eberhardt Martin, 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, transferred to the Navy at the end of 1943 and fought as the commander of a oneman U-Boot. Here he is seen as a student in the National Political Academy at Klotzsche.



The divisional commander, SS-Oberführer Theodor Wisch, with a platoon leader of the Panzergrenadiere.



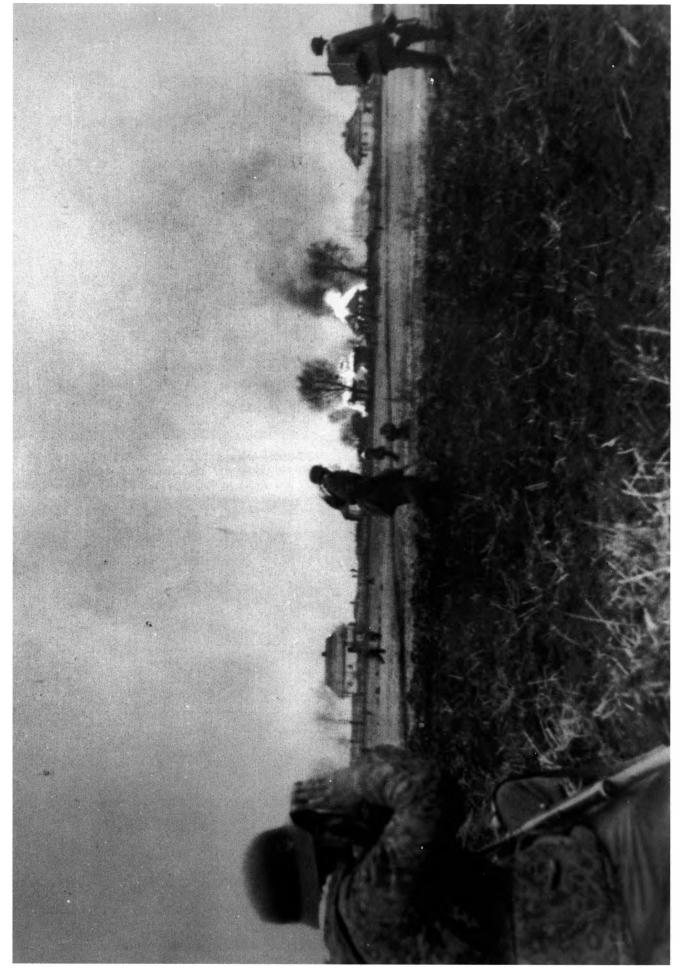
SS-Unterscharführer Emil Brehmer, Headquarters Company, II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Sturmmann Harald Henn, loader in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Sturmmann Wilhelm Nußhag, radio operator in the main radio station of the staff of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in December 1943.



During the attack on Wel. Ratscha on 11 December 1943. SS-Panzergrenadiere advancing on a Soviet-occupied village.





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Heidelberg, Plarrgasse 7, den 27. Dezember 1944.



SS-Obersturmführer Kurt Kleist, commander of the 3./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Killed in action on 6 December 1943 at Sliptscisy. Here seen as SS-Standartenführer of the Allgemein SS, along with his death notice.

SS-Untersturmführer Gerd Jahn, platoon leader in the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class on 5 December 1943. Here in Starga Suta.



A radio station of the staff of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Obersturmführer Hans Stübing of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was severely wounded on 8 December 1943 at Sabolot. He was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 13 February 1944.



General der Panzertruppe Raus, commander-in-chief of the 4. Panzer-Armee, visited the commander of the Leibstandarte, SS-Oberführer Theodor Wisch, at his command post on 13 December 1943.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke (right), commander of the 1. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Unterscharführer Willi Sadzio, transferred to the Waffen-SS from the Luftwaffe, was killed in action as a Tiger commander on 28 December 1943 at Iwanko.



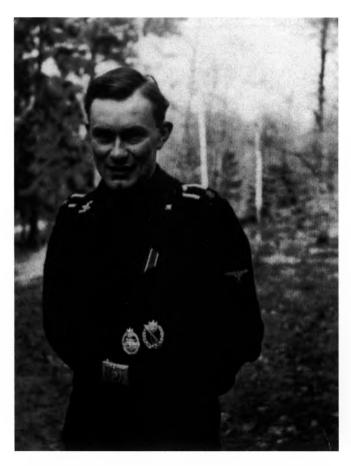
A successful platoon leader in the 13. (Tiger) Kompanie in November and December 1943, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut "Bubi" Wendorff. He was awarded the Knight's Cross in February 1944.



SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto commanded the 4. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Sturmmann Günter Mollnau, radio operator in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Unterscharführer Adalbert Wichmann, tank commander in the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, in the winter of 1943/1944.



SS-Sturmmann Karl-Heinz Warmbrunn, 13. (schwere) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, received the Iron Cross, 1st Class after his 47th enemy tank destroyed on 5 December 1943. Here seen as a as SS-Unterscharführer.



SS-Unterscharführer Friedl Tibcke, killed in action on 6 December 1943, as platoon leader in the 3. (schwere) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Hauptscharführer Walter Robock, 3. (schwere) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Unterscharführer Hans Siptrott, in action at the front from the first to the last as a tank commander with the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. He was awarded the German Cross in Gold, the Panzerkampfabzeichen, 3rd Class (for 50 days of combat), General Assault Badge, and other awards. Ultimately, he became a SS-Hauptscharführer.



Hermann Schuhmann, driver in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, Peiper's orderly officer in the Panzer Regiment in November and December 1943.



Tank crew of "504" of the 5. Kompanie during a break in the fighting in December 1943. From left to right: Mehlig, Hans Oeser (tank commander), Karl Wisura, Steinhöfel and Quandt.



SS-Rottenführer Walter Klimm (radio operator in panzer "504"); SS-Unterscharführer Sepp Neumann; SS-Unterscharführer Hans Oeser (tank commander in "504"); SS-Sturmmann Horst Steinhöfel (gunner in "504"); and SS-Unterscharführer Heinz Olenik (driver of "504").



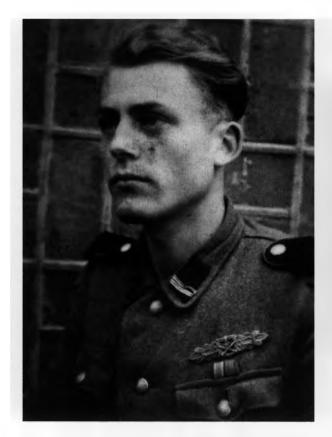
Tankers of the 5. Kompanie preparing a goose for roasting. From the left: SS-Rottenführer Walter Klimm (radio operator); SS-Unterscharführer Theo "Tetsche" Jensen (tank commander); SS-Unterscharführer Sepp Neumann (tank commander); SS-Sturmmann Horst Steinhöfel (gunner); SS-Unterscharführer Heinz Olenik (driver).



A Russian village in the winter 1943/1944, where elements of the Headquarters Company of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 were located.



SS-Unterscharführer Günther Wagner of the 13. (gep.) /SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, who went to officer candidate school in 1944, in front of a staff car with the blow torch visible on its door.



SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler, gun commander of a "Grille" in the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling assumed command of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in December 1943.



The "Grille" self-propelled artillery piece with its 15 cm infantry gun in the winter of 1943.



Tiger "S45" of the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 21 with mounted Panzergrenadiere. In front of the tank SS-Unterscharführer Molly, the tank commander, and his gunner, Lau (right).



Panther of the 4. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



Tank attack by the 5. Kompanie.



SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 with Italian drivers.



The SPW-Battalion in December 1943: SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern, unknown, Gerhard Babick (11. (gep.) Kompanie), Heinz Tomhardt (13. Kompanie) and Heinz Sander. Above, the Spieß of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Oberscharführer August Schirmag.



SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Scharke, commander of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was killed on 8 December 1943 at Sabolot.



SS-Panzerschütze Heinz Buchner, gunner in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, had already destroyed a total of 51 Soviet tanks by July 1943.



SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes commanded the 2. (Panther) Kompanie starting in December 1943.



SS-Rottenführer Hans Kazmeier, tank commander in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. He was killed in action on 20 December 1943 at Tschepowitschi.



SS-Sturmmann Heinz Schindhelm, gunner in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Unterscharführer Hans Oeser, headquarters section leader, 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Hauptscharführer Konrad Heubeck (here a SS-Oberscharführer), platoon leader in the 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, received the Knight's Cross in April 1945.



Tank "054" from the staff of the Panzer Regiment being towed by a Tiger from the 13. Kompanie.



21 December 1943, 1230 hours, Tschepowitsche. The final tank destroyed by SS-Unterscharführer Hans Oeser, headquarters section leader in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. The burning Soviet tank is in the village.



SS-Oberscharführer Martin Säuberlich, 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Rottenführer Hermann Dähne of the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadie Regiment 2 was wounded on 21 December 1943 at Tschepowitschi.



SS-Unterscharführer Hans-Manfred Niehrenheim, tank commander in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Rottenführer Walter Lau, loader and gunner in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Unterscharführer Harry Bergner, radio operator in the company commander's tank in the 6. Kompanie. He was killed in action on 19 December 1943 at Stremigorod.



SS-Obersturmführer Horst Beckmann, signals officer for the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was wounded and captured by the Soviets on 21 December 1943 at Tschepowitschi. He never returned from captivity.



SS-Obersturmführer Walter Malchow, commander of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Awarded the German Cross in Gold in the winter of 1943, he was severely wounded on 23 December 1943.



SS-Oberscharführer Rudolf Hoffrichter (here as SS-Untersturmführer), tank commander in the 7. Kompanie. He received the Iron Cross, 1st Class on 24 December 1943.



SS-Oberscharführer August Schirmag, Spieß of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in 1943.



SS-Sturmmann Edmund Martin, radio operator in the 3. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Hauptscharführer Michael Meschnarz, Spieß of the 6. Kompanie.



SS-Oberscharführer Erich Strelow, tank commander in the 1. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Junker Eduard Hohmann, 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



The commander of the I. (Panther) Abteilung of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann.



Combat engineers of the 14. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1: Bernhard Hasenknopf, Günther Schrobsdorf and Herman Stehlmann.



SS-Unterscharführer Günther Wagner, the veteran mortar section leader of the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



Location of the main radio station of the Panzer regiment at Wazkoff at the beginning of December 1943. The signals officer, Helmut Jahn, helps SS-Sturmmann Walter Landfried push the car.



On 24 December 1943 Peiper presented the Iron Cross, 1st Class to his signals officer, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn (center) as well as to the adjutant of the I. Abteilung, SS-Untersturmführer Gottfried Winterhoff. On the right, the regimental adjutant, SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Nüske.



SS-Untersturmführer Gerd Jahn, platoon leader in the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in the winter of 1943/1944. Starting in August 1944 he was the commander of the 3. Kompanie and SS-Obersturmführer.



SS-Hauptscharführer Martin Appelt, tank commander in the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 until the end of 1943. Before the war, he was with Peiper in the 11./LAH.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, commander of the 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



On 27 December 1943 SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Wendorff knocked out 13 enemy tanks. On the following day he knocked out 11 more. That brought his total to 58, for which Peiper submitted him for the Knight's Cross. Wendorff was among the most successful commanders in the Tiger Company.



The signals platoon of the 1. SS-Panzer Regiment 1 celebrates Christmas 1943. Paul Schierig (left), who sometimes rode with Peiper, Rößler (in gray trousers), Walter Görlitz, (third from the right) and Herbert Schenitzki (second from the right).



Schneider, Erhardt and Edeling from the signals platoon of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



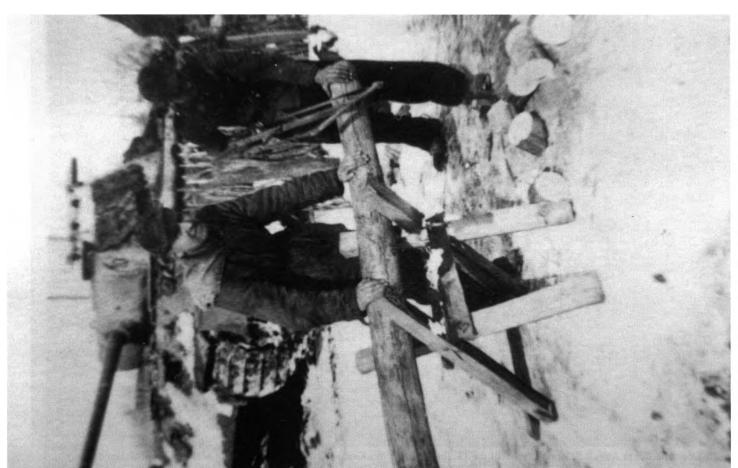
SS-Sturmmann Roland Söffker, gunner in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was sent to officer training in December 1943. Here as a SS-Junker.



SS-Oberscharführer August Schirmag, Spieß of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, in front of the marker for the company command post.



SS-Unterscharführer Paßler's shot up Panther, belonging to the 3. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. One hit can be seen to the left on the gun mantlet. On the right is the driver, SS-Unterscharführer Erich Plonne, who received both classes of the Iron Cross on 5 May 1944.



A Panther in billeting area. The men are sawing wood to heat one of the Russian huts.

Side view of the knocked-out Panther. The hit to the turret can clearly be seen. Erich Plonne on the right.



Johannes Ober, who was awarded both Iron Crosses while serving as a gunner in SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in the summer of 1943, was sent to an officer course and became a SS-Untersturmführer. He was killed in action 7 April 1945 at the age of 19 during the fighting around the Prater in Vienna while serving in SS-Panzer Regiment 3 "Totenkopf".



SS-Sturmmann Walter Kettl, loader in the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was sent to an officer school in 1944 and promoted to SS-Untersturmführer at the age of 19.



SS-Sturmmann Walter Kettl and SS-Sturmmann Otto Fischer of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in front of their tank.



Tank "515" of the 1st platoon of the 5./SS-Panzer Regiment 1. In the rear: Radio operator Günter Mollnau and driver Leo Thau (right). In front: tank commander SS-Unterscharführer Franke (left), gunner Hermann Schumann and loader Grenz. December 1943.



Tigers of the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer Regiment 1 prior to an attack.



SPW of the 13. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer Regiment 1 in December 1943. A butchered pig on the left crossing girder.



21 February 1944: long columns of Russian POW's march into German captivity.



SS-Untersturnführer Michael Wittmann was awarded the Knight's Cross on 14 January 1944. At that point, he had destroyed a total of 66 enemy tanks.



Wittmann's gunner, SS-Rottenführer Balthasar Woll, received the Knight's Cross on 16 January 1944. By that time he had destroyed 80 enemy tanks and 107 antitank guns.



On 18 January 1944 Jochen Peiper visited the crew of the most successful tank commander in the regiment, SS-Untersturmführer Michael Wittmann. By that date he had knocked out 88 enemy tanks.



The 19-year-old SS-Panzerschütze Sepp Rößner, Wittmann's radio operator. On 18 January 1944 he received both the Iron Cross, 1st Class and Iron Cross, 2nd Class, just like Wittmann's driver and loader. The award document for the Iron Cross, 1st Class wasn't filled out until 30 January 1944.



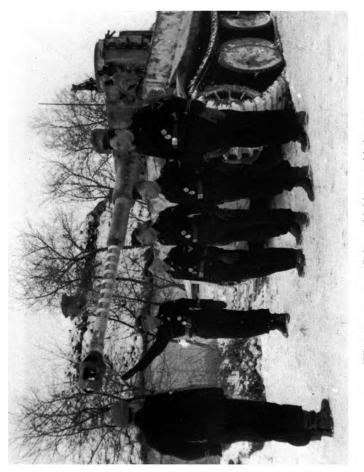
Peiper and Nüske.



Wittmann and Peiper.



The divisional commander SS-Oberführer Wisch arrives and addresses Wittmann's successful crew. From the left: Nüske, Wisch and Peiper.



Wittmann reports to Peiper with his assembled crew.



Jochen Peiper stares in amazement at the kill rings on the cannon of Tiger "S04" which symbolize a total of 88 knocked-out tanks.

Peiper greets each man of Wittmann's crew. In this photo, gunner SS-Rottenführer Balthasar



Peiper congratulates Wittmann's radio operator Sepp Rößner.



Michael Wittmann, Sepp Rößner, Werner Irrgang, Eugen Schmidt, Balthasar Woll. Rößner, Irrgang, and Schmidt were awarded both classes of the Iron Cross simultaneously.



Michael Wittmann, gunner SS-Rottenführer Balthasar Woll, loader SS-Panzeroberschütze Werner Irrgang, radio operator SS-Panzerschütze Sepp Rößner and driver SS-Sturmmann Eugen Schmidt.



SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper received the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross on 27 January 1944. He wears his typical white turtleneck in this photograph which was retouched by the press.

## Das Eichenlaub für 44-Sturmbannführer Peiper

Junger Berliner Pauzerführer ausgezeichnet.

Führerhauptquartier, 3. Februar

Der Führer verlieh am 27. Januar das Eichenlaub des Ritterkreuzes an #-Sturmbannführer Joachim Pelper, Kommandenr des Pauzerregiments in der #-Pauzerdivision Leibstandarte # Adolf Hitler als 377. Soldaten der deutschen Wehrmacht.

377. Soldaten der deutschen Wehrmacht.

##-Sturmbannführer Peiper hat mit einer gepanserten Kampfgruppe ostwärts Schitomir einen Durchbruch durch die feindliche Hauptkampflinie erzwungen und ist, diesen Briolg aus eigenem Entschluß ausnützend, in die Tiefe der feindlichen Stellungen hineingestoßen. Dabei konnte er die Divisionsstäbe von vier feindlichen Divisionen wusheben und in ungestümem Vorwärtsmarsch faindliche Batterien und Paktronten zerschlagen. Durch diesen Stoß 30 km, tief in den Rücken des Ganners wurde in diesem Bezeich, die feindliche Front ins Wanken gebracht und des eitgene Vorgehen ermoglicht. Sein Regiment vernichtett in diesen Kampfen insgesati 190 Pakten 198. Pakten Geschälte sowie vieles-under Gertt mit Beginnen Geschälte sowie vieles-und manns a. D. Weldemar P. in Berlin geboren und trei nach Besuch der Oberrealschule in die 4f ein. Auf der #-Junkerschule Braunschweig zum #-Untersturmführer befordert. Wurde er 1938 zum Adjutanten des Reichtstehen Bereichen des Otteldzuges als Bataillonskommandeur wiederholt durch personlichen Schneid und

cheft under Michaele Mich. Westfeldzag: als Kompanischeft under Miraho des Obtestezuges als Bataillonskom mandeur wiederholt durch personlichen Schneld und entschlußtreudige Führung aus. Er arhielt am 9. März 1943 bei den Kämpien um Charkow das Ritterkreuz und am 6. Mai 1943 das Deutsche Kreuz in Gold.



In the Führer Headquarters Wolfsschanze in February 1944 Peiper was personally presented the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross by Adolf Hitler.



SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper in February 1944 at the Führer Headquarters Wolfschanze at Rastenburg in East Prussia.





Peiper in a photograph used by news agencies in numerous newspapers on the occasion of his award of the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross.







Michael Wittmann was at the Führer Headquarters shortly before Peiper to receive the Oak Leaves.





Peiper in the Führer Headquarters after being awarded the Oak Leaves.



SS-Untersturmführer Michael Wittmann, platoon leader in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 14 January 1944 and the Oak Leaves on 30 January 1944.



On 23 February 1944 the company commander of the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling, was awarded the Knight's Cross.



SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Wendorff received the Knight's Cross on 12 February 1944 while serving as a platoon leader in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



In January 1944 SS-Hauptscharführer Kurt Sametreiter of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 was transferred to the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. He was awarded the Knight's Cross on 31 July 1943 while in SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1. Here he is seen as a SS-Oberscharführer in the summer of 1943.



Panther "319" of the 3. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, commanded by SS-Unterscharführer Valentin Bersin (in the middle, holding the cup).



March 1944: SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl once again took command of the SPW-Bataillon. SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Breme (left), SS-Obersturmführer Babick (front right) and SS-Untersturmführer Tomhardt (far right).



The knocked-out SPW of SS-Unterscharführer Hein Erkelenz of the 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. He was reported missing in action in December 1943. SS-Unterscharführer Alfred Benick (left) and SS-Rottenführer Gerhard Münzer (right).



SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern, platoon leader in the 11. (gep.) SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and orderly officer in the III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. In addition to other awards he wore the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Nahkampfspange in Bronze.

Graves of the Panzergrenadiere of the SPW-Bataillon killed in action in January 1944.



## Reorganization of the Panzer Regiment in Flanders: April to June 1944

It took until 25 April 1944 to complete transport of the division. After the long train ride the exhausted men of the Panzer regiment took up billets in Flanders. The regimental staff was in Hasselt, the I. Abteilung in Houthalen and the II. Abteilung in and around Genk. The regimental command post with its telephone switchboard and staff offices was set up in a large school in Hasselt. Jochen Peiper linked up with his regiment there after his convalescence. He established himself in a house about 100 meters from the command post, where his adjutant, SS-Hauptsturmführer Nüske, was also billeted. Peiper wrote:

When the unexpected movement came, the tank crews without vehicles had to "procure" horses and wagons as soon as possible and load these, along with their meager personal belongings, on the train. After endless misrouting, they finally arrived in Brussels. Upon their arrival, they promptly got on the nerves of the well-cared for occupation warriors. When Peiper arrived late there was already a complaint from the commandant of the city where the Panzer regiment of the Leibstandarte had ridden past the soldiers' home in Brussels in Panje wagons.

They then returned to normal duties and the companies carried out intensive training for their new replacements. Tankers arrived daily at the regiment from their convalescent leave, and a number of officers returned or were newly assigned to the regiment.

The SPW-Bataillon commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl was located in and around Bree. During the reorganization the Iron Cross, 1st Class was presented to the following soldiers of the SPW-Bataillon on 15 March 1944: SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler, gun commander in the 14. Kompanie; SS-Rottenführer and SPW driver Fritz Karg and SS-Unterscharführer Robert Koschik of the 11. Kompanie; and, SS-Unterscharführer Robert Mundinger of the 12. Kompanie.

On the same day, in the Panzer regiment, the Iron Cross, 1st Class was awarded to: Peiper's orderly officer, SS-Standartenoberjunker Kurt Köchlin; SS-Unterscharführer Valentin Bersin and SS-Rottenführer Walter Beran, both in the 3. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Emil Frieb, 5. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Werner Joch and Franz Reissner, both in the 7. Kompanie; SS-Oberscharführer Walter Brandstäter and SS-Unterscharführer Hans Nicolaisen, in the 8. Kompanie; SS-Rottenführer Karl Ohlrogge, in the 14. (Pi.) Kompanie; and, to the orderly officer of the II. Abteilung, SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Gustav Richert. The 36-year-old Richert was an SS-Obersturmbannführer of the Allgemeine SS and, after he was wounded on 9 March 1944, was sent to the SS Main Office where he became deputy head of the Section for Eastern Affairs and was employed in the raising of the Wlassow Army.

In Belgium the Leibstandarte was placed under the command of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps, and Sepp Dietrich visited his old division a number of times. Regardless of whether tanker or Panzergrenadier, the members of the Leibstandarte had been through the hardest action they had ever participated in up to that point. The unit commanders had to occupy themselves with a great deal of paper work, such as letters to the parents of the killed and missing and the preparation of lists of materièl and personnel, etc.

SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper had his private quarters in Kiewitt near Hasselt. His wife Sigurd also stayed there when she visited. The regimental command post was moved to a former children's home in a park in Hasselt-Kiewitt. Because they had to wait some time for the delivery of tanks, the companies occupied themselves initially with intensive infantry training for both veteran and new soldiers. Men were continuously returning to their old units. Once more Jochen Peiper had his experienced staff at hand, with SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Nüske as adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn as the signals officer and Kurt Köchlin - promoted to SS-Untersturmführer on 8 March 1944 – as orderly officer. In the beginning the 3rd orderly officer – for liaison to the division – was SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck. He was followed by SS-Standartenoberjunker Alfred Kasper who, in turn, was followed by the 19-year-old SS-Standartenoberjunker Georg Adam. The former keeper of the war diary for the regiment, SS-Oberscharführer Werner Hentschel, was broken in as the 2nd orderly officer.2

The staff company of the Panzer regiment was quartered in a school in Hasselt and soon received new Panzer IV's. Peiper's new command tank, with the number "001" on its turret, also arrived. The regimental staff was equipped with Panzer IV's. The companies began intensive training for the tank commanders, radio operators and drivers as well as for the loaders and gunners, with special attention given to making reliable tank men from the inexperienced replacements. A number of the men from the Panzer regiment were called back from leave by telegrams announcing: "Return immediately to the unit". SS-Sturnmann Heinz Hänze, from the 5. Kompanie, described the reorganization:

The company, which arrived from the east, always in groups of 10 men, was reorganized at the Bockrijk Monastery. Tanks arrived and the appropriate training began. Training wasn't just limited to tanks, however, we also did the manual of arms and parade marches in the fields. The replacements – including some from the Luftwaffe – had to be integrated into the unit, and I remember this went very well. I don't recall exercises with live ammunition.<sup>3</sup>

At Bockrijk the 5. Kompanie was first quartered in the monastery and then, from 1 May to 6 June 1944, in the castle. Among other things, tank commander courses and additional training for tank radio operators took place in Bockrijk. The 6. and 7. Kompanien were quartered in a school in Genk. SS-Junker Karl Zumpe of the 6. Kompanie reported:

The school was converted to a barracks. The first sergeant even set up a competition for the decoration of the sleeping rooms. I was able to get recognition for the room for which I was responsible as a part of the contest. We impressed the judges with pithy sayings on the bare walls, such as "Praise that which makes you tough". A local railway connected the different villages in this mining district. It appeared that a place called Waterscheid offered unexpected pleasures. There were still dances there on the weekends. When we went there it was sometimes hard to get back to quarters before lights-out. When you strolled along the road there it was easy for the owner of a tavern to entice us into her place. A harmonica player and drummer played waltzes and it wasn't long before there was no room left ... There was even a modern movie theater ... An out-

standing "cultural event" was the company party which took place in the gymnasium. In any case a troop of actors arrived to entertain the troops and to provide a few hours of enjoyment. We had prepared a few things for the festivities too. I had to provide a musical interlude. But the main attraction was a beautiful blonde who was surrounded by the men. It was our officers who were outdoing each other to lay on the charm.<sup>4</sup>

The 8. Kompanie was in Zwartberg near Genk. Tankers who had recovered from wounds were continuously returning to the regiment from the replacement units. One of these was tank radio operator Edmund Martin, who wrote on 22 May 1941 from the SS signals replacement regiment:

To my great joy, I have only one more day in Nuremberg. By 1632 hours tomorrow I will already have reported in at the Brussels personnel collection point and to my old unit. This morning, I was so happy that I could have hugged everyone this morning. Now, at least, I can be there in the west when things heat up ... <sup>5</sup>

The members of the Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment were happy to get orders back to their old units, where they felt at home and where they knew that they would be with reliable veterans who had proven themselves in the east. In the meantime, more tanks began to arrive. In May 1944 SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser picked up some 50 new Panthers at Mailly-le-Camp and took them to Houthalen by rail.6 The staff of the I. (schwere) Abteilung of the Panzer regiment was located at Houthalen, and the battalion's companies were quartered in the surrounding area.7 The 3. Kompanie was billeted in a school and its tanks were placed in camouflaged positions on a moor about 2 kilometers away. The 4. Kompanie was in the school at Winterslag. A reconnaissance platoon, Flak platoon and a motorcycle terrain reconnaissance platoon (with an engineer squad) was established in the headquarters company of the I. (Panther) Abteilung.8 SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling also organized the same types of platoons in the II. Abteilung at Waterschei. The Flak platoon consisted of three 2 cm quad Flak on half-track prime movers. A few enlisted personnel and the noncommissioned officers, Hans Brückner and Fritz Lindemeier, were transferred from the Luftwaffe to train the Flak crews. They would be in Normandy with the Panzer regiment, where Brückner led the platoon.

In the regimental headquarters company there was a Flak platoon commanded by SS-Hauptscharführer Paul Schröder, a reconnaissance platoon consisting of five Panzer IV's under SS-Untersturmführer Erich Münkemer, and a motorcycle scout platoon, equipped with Schwimmwagen, under SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Ziege (later SS-Oberscharführer Köhnen). Since the city of Hasselt had been a target for repeated allied air attacks, the regimental staff company Flak platoon moved to the bridge across the Albert Canal near Hasselt, as this was a frequent target for the bombing attacks. The platoon leader, SS-Hauptscharführer Paul Schröder, was an experienced Flak man who had received the Iron Cross, 1st Class as a member of an 8.8 cm Flak battery of the LAH on 15 March 1944. His platoon was equipped with three 2 cm quad 38 Flak mounted on Sd.Kfz. 8/2's, a half-track made by Krauss-Maffai.

Peiper placed great value on overhead camouflage. In Kiewatt, after one of the tanks of the orderly officers had been guided into position and left behind observable tracks in the grass, Peiper summoned one of the Sturmmann of the signals platoon who had helped out with the placement of the tank. Peiper had observed the affair from a window. This man – who expected to be thoroughly chewed out – was quietly and factually informed of the danger from aircraft and ordered to hide the track marks as well as possible.<sup>11</sup>

In May 1944 some 40 men of the Panzer regiment were temporarily detached to attend a course with the Panzer-Lehr-Division in Normandy. Although the Panzer regiment was able to show rapid progress with the refitting of materièl, the training level of the replacement troops in this fifth year of the war was no longer up to the original standards. The adjutant of the Panther battalion, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, described the difficulties:

We quickly received new fighting vehicles and crew replacements who had not received training or who had been very poorly trained. There were problems with every aspect of training: lack of fuel hindered driver training and firing exercises; the "neighborhood" was disposed to be hostile; and, the enemy's air superiority meant that all movement had to be made under cover.<sup>12</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller described service with the 7. Panzer-Kompanie in Genk:

The company was quartered in a large boarding school. The strength in officers, noncommissioned officers and men was far below what the tables of organization and equipment required ... Obersturmführer Wolff commanded the company. Full of energy and initiative, he worked hard every day to build up the company and increase its combat strength. All of our troops were trained as infantry to repel airborne attack. At the beginning of May the company began to fill up a bit, when a few more members of the company who had been attached to other Kampfgruppen in the east returned to the rest area. These were old hands in tanks. The company soon reached two thirds of its required strength.

Severe problems arose because of continuous air attacks on the railroad bridge at Hasselt and on the railroad line. In addition, the "white brigades" were also active. Preventive measures taken by the company included night patrols in platoon and company strength as well as double walking sentries posted at night on the main street in the summer house quarter. These measures prevented any serious problem except for a couple of insignificant ambushes. Even so, at night Kurt Sametreiter and I kept machine pistols and grenades at hand after a couple of suspicious explosions in the vicinity and the appearance of people in the garden areas of the houses who had no business there. The increasing insecurity finally forced us to concentrate all the officers in the house. By the end of May we had received replacements for the entire regiment ... tanks and vehicles arrived a few days later. A noncommissioned officer social event and a handball tournament in Zwartberg, one Sunday before the invasion, provided a bit of a change ... Gasoline shortages and unsuitable terrain, along with security requirements, however, did not permit driving the

Jochen Peiper gave command of the 7. Panzer-Kompanie to his former adjutant in the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's cross winner Werner Wolff. The 21-year-old Wolff had been wounded in Russia in November 1943 and

arrived at the Panzer regiment in Genk in April 1944, where he took over the 7. Kompanie from Sternebeck. He had never had any tank training. SS-Untersturmführer Stiller said:

Since the company didn't reach full strength and wasn't fully equipped until the end of May 1944, we could scarcely carry out any tank training during the weeks that we were at Genk. Then, when the platoons were finally organized with their vehicles, security forbade any unit exercises – not only in fighting formations, but also by radio simulation in stationary vehicles ... The enlisted personnel were predominantly trained as infantry, whether they were replacements or front-line veterans. Only two of the officers with the company, as far as I knew, were veteran tank men. The rest were new to this branch of service ...

Although Werner Wolff had a six month training period as a cadet, his real military background was first obtained under Peiper. He once told me so himself, and it must have been true. This was very much to his advantage, for Peiper had the gift of training men to a high standard. As a comrade, Wolff was relatively reserved. One could say he was reluctant to communicate. He was really very much preoccupied with himself, and whatever he learned, was his forever. Strong willed as he was a real combat soldier — he could sometimes overstep the limits in that regard. Who else did he have? Peiper visited the company often in Genk, and I believe that Wolff knew why. His relationship with the battalion commander Kling was extremely reserved. Their opinions must have been very different frequently, which I can readily understand. 14

Werner Wolff felt that he was closely tied to Peiper and, although he emulated him in one respect, he avoided copying him and developed his own personality. Peiper also valued Wolff highly. At the end of May 1944 the Inspector General for Panzer Units, Generaloberst Heinz Guderian, visited the Panzer regiment in Genk. Peiper introduced him to the battalion and company commanders. During lunch Peiper and SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff sat across from Sepp Dietrich and Guderian. In deadly earnest, Peiper told Dietrich: "Obergruppenführer, Wolff has been engaged for seven years and doesn't want to get married." Dietrich, who never avoided snap decisions, immediately told the disconcerted Wolff to get his fiancé to Belgium and marry her there.15 And on that very same evening, Wolff's gunner was put on a train to Riga to bring back some documents from the Panzer Replacement Regiment. Above and beyond this official mission, he had the real task of picking up Wolff's fiancée, Helga, in Memel and bringing her back with him to Belgium. 16

On 14 May 1944 the Panther battalion, commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, and the Panzer IV battalion were mustered on an open field in Houthalen where Poetschke reported the command to Peiper. Then Peiper awarded decorations for the recent operations on the Eastern Front and handed out Iron Cross, 1st Class medals awarded to 27 soldiers on 5 May 1944. Among those decorated was his tank driver, SS-Unterscharführer Otto Becker. 160 men were awarded the Iron Cross, 2nd Class. On 3 June 1944 four men of the "Tiger"-Kompanie, which was no longer a part of the regiment, received the Iron Cross, 1st Class. 17

After his return to the unit SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann again took command of the I. Abteilung. The com-

manders of the 1., 2., 3., and 4. Kompanien were SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Sachse and SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto. <sup>18</sup> The II. Abteilung was commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Heinz Kling, and his adjutant was SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Helmut Wendorff, who like Kling had come to the II. Abteilung from the Tiger-Kompanie. The commanders of the 5., 6., 7., and 8. Kompanien were SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Streipart, Benoni Junker, Werner Wolff and Sepp Armberger. <sup>19</sup> There were two holders of the Knight's Cross in the 7. Kompanie in addition to Werner Wolff and SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Sametreiter, who had transferred from the tank destroyer battalion. Tank commander SS-Junker Karl Zumpe remembered this period of reorganization:

When the company was rebuilt we received a number of members of the Luftwaffe along with a few SS men. There was even a pilot with a number of enemy aircraft to his credit among them. The daily schedule was full of exercises and training, and it became apparent that the newcomers didn't have the proper attitude at first. This attitude can be illustrated by a single example. We had our new tanks out on the field to practice loading and aiming at a distant target using range estimation techniques. I went over each point with my new crew but, of course, I had previously removed the firing pin, so that no shot could be fired. Suddenly, we saw a rising mushroom of smoke at a distance of 1000 meters. The shell had impacted very close to a stretch of railroad. An approaching train on the suburban line stopped, and the passengers poured out of its doors, seeking safety in flight. The perpetrators of this incident were at first highly amused, but later they had to own up to the potential consequences of their reprehensible act. Field training for the tank drivers was also unsatisfactory, which later showed up in operations. Of course, it wasn't easy to adapt to our discipline and high state of readiness, especially for those coming from the Luftwaffe. 20

The 13.(schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, formerly so successful on the Eastern Front, was no longer a part of the regiment, but now belonged to the newly-formed schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101. On 5 May 1944 Oak Leaves winner Michael Wittmann visited Jochen Peiper for a detailed conference. SS-Obersturmführer Wittmann commanded the 2. Kompanie of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101, which was being formed in the area of Gournay-en-Bray, between Rouen and Beauvais. The battalion consisted of three tank companies - each with 14 Tigers - a headquarters company and a maintenance company. It later had a light company as well. The Tiger battalion was a corps unit for the I. SS-Panzer-Korps. In the meantime, Wittmann's gunner, Knight's Cross winner Balthasar Woll, had become an SS-Unterscharführer and tank commander in Wittmann's company. SS-Standartenjunker Franz Staudegger and SS-Standartenoberjunker Alfred Günther, who belonged to the Tiger battalion, had also won the Knight's Cross. 21

Around Pentecost 1944 the men of the Panzer-Regiment witnessed court-martial proceedings. SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer remembered the proceedings:

Four young men - young rascals from the replacement units

– had robbed a farmstead and stolen chickens while in uniform and wearing face masks. According to military law, that was looting. A formal court martial presided over by the divisional military judge was conducted in front of the assembled regiment in an open field. The four were found guilty and shot the next day – likewise in front of the entire regiment. This sort of thing had happened before and we were shocked by the severity of the sentence. We could barely stand it. We couldn't explain it to the men, because we officers couldn't understand it. Our operations were truly "suicide affairs". You could have at least given these young rascals a chance to redeem themselves during one of them! <sup>22</sup>

Due to his knowledge of jurisprudence, the signals officers, SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Pönisch, was assigned as defense counsel. However, he was unable to get the verdict changed. SS-Sturmmann Edmund Martin of the 3. Kompanie was a witness at the trial:

The regiment was formed up in a meadow in an open rectangle in front of the judges table ... There was talk of chicken and bicycle theft, but there must have been more to it than that. We thought that the death sentence was unjustified, but we couldn't form any clear opinion, as we didn't know the charge. <sup>23</sup>

After the sentencing, the men were shot in a woods outside of Houthalen.24 In the regiment this sentence was considered to be completely incomprehensible and excessive.25 During the third week of May a sizable group of recruits arrived who had been trained in the SS armor replacement battalion in Riga. They were greeted by Peiper in Hasselt.26 The new men were assembled at the school yard in Hasselt and they were inducted into the Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment by Peiper with a short speech. Afterwards, he went through their ranks to inspect the young soldiers and took the time to speak to a number of them. At this point the regiment was generally complete as far as personnel was concerned, but still lacked tanks and vehicles. Training took place under the difficulties of the fifth year of the war and didn't reach the standards of earlier periods. There were no major exercises at battalion or regimental level, let alone in conjunction with the SPW-Bataillon. For reasons of security, driving practice for the tank drivers was also eliminated.

When a young tank commander in the 8. Kompanie, who had just returned from marriage leave, tried to throw a hand grenade from a tank turret into a simulated infantry position during an exercise at Zwartberg, it detonated immediately after it was primed and killed him. This was one of the frequent cases of sabotage in this fifth year of the war.

Each of the four companies of the I. Abteilung was organized into three platoons of five Panthers, with an additional Panther for the company commander and the company headquarters section leader, so that each company consisted of 17 Panthers. The II. Abteilung had five Panzer IV's in each of the four platoons in its four companies. Including the two company headquarters tanks, each company had 22 Panzer IV's. These were the model 'J' Panzer IV's. With the Panzer IV's of the companies, the five tanks of the regimental combat reconnaissance platoon, and the three regimental staff tanks for the commander, adjutant, and signals officer, Peiper's actual strength should have been 96 Panzer IV's and 73 Panthers, or a total of 169 tanks. In addition the 9. (Pi.) Kompanie – renamed from the former 14. (Pi.)

Kompanie) – was also part of the regiment. It consisted of three SPW platoons and a flame-thrower platoon. In addition there were three headquarters companies within the regiment and a maintenance and motor transport company for each of the battalions. <sup>28</sup>

In spite of intensive preparation for the forthcoming operations, Jochen Peiper was realist enough to realize that the military situation for Germany in the spring of 1944 looked bad. The operational situation on the Eastern Front continued to deteriorate, and the expected landing by the Allies in northern France was soon to take place. The waiting for the invasion had increased internal tensions. In the Panzer regiment of the "Hitlerjugend" Division, which at that time was located in France, the story went around among the officers that Peiper had, in reference to the precarious situation, recommended to Himmler with his typical sarcasm, "Reichsführer, raise battalions of women!" <sup>29</sup>

The reorganization of SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl's SPW-Bataillon had also progressed in the previous weeks in a manner similar to the Panzer regiment. The new SPW had arrived and the training of the new men showed progress. Soldiers who had especially distinguished themselves in action in Russia, were decorated at company formations.

On 5 May 1944 the following members of the SPW-Bataillon were awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class: signals officer SS-Standartenjunker Heinrich Meyburg; the commander of the 13. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt; the SPW driver, SS-Rottenführer Paul Zwigart, and SS-Unterscharführer Kurt Heißner in the 11. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Gerhard Mann and Rudi Knobloch in the 12. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Heinz Klose in the 13. Kompanie; and, SS-Rottenführer Rudi Schwambach and SS-Oberscharführer Willi Mewes (who hadn't been with the company for a long time) in the 14. Kompanie.

On 10 May 1944 SS-Unterscharführer Karl Keltner (11. Kompanie), SS-Rottenführer Franz Motejat (12. Kompanie) and the former battalion surgeon, Dr. Friedrich Breme, were decorated with the Iron Cross, 1st Class. The Italian SS-Panzergrenadiere, Cesar Sarasino and Augusto Alliot, were among those receiving the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.<sup>30</sup>

The 11. Kompanie was located in Opitter, the 12. in Gardingen, the 13. in Gruitrode and the 14. in Bree. The 11., 12, and 13. (gep.) Kompanien were once again outfitted with SPW (Sd.Kfz. 251), which were armed with the MG 42. The heavy platoons received SPW with heavy machine guns and mortars. The 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie in Bree had six 15 cm Infantry Guns on the Grille self-propelled carriage. After the beginning of the invasion, these Grillen were turned over to the regimental infantry gun companies, because the infantry gun platoon of the 14. (s. gep.) Kompanie was supposed to be equipped with SPW with 7.5 cm antitank cannons. The mortar platoon led by SS-Oberscharführer Hans Fuchs was also waiting for its equipment, SPW with 12 cm mortars. The combat engineer platoon under SS-Hauptscharführer Wilhelm Haferstroh, on the other hand, was completely refitted.

On 5 June 1944 36 officers, noncommissioned officers and men of the SPW-Bataillon received the Nahkampfspange in Silver for surviving more than 30 days of close combat. Among those officers so honored were: the battalion commander, SS- Hauptsturmführer Guhl; SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt, 11. Kompanie; SS-Obersturmführer Preuß, 12. Kompanie; SS-Obersturmführer Tomhardt and SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, both 13. Kompanie; and, SS-Obersturmführer Babick. To name some of the noncommissioned officers and men: SS-Rottenführer Adalbert Klein, signals section; the 19-year-old SS-Rottenführer Ernst Barth and SS-Hauptscharführer Max Leike, 11. Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Karl Menne from the mortar squad of the 12. Kompanie; SS-Sturmmann Karl Wies, 13. Kompanie; and, SS-Rottenführer Rudolf Schwambach and Werner Kindler from the 14. Kompanie.

When the Leibstandarte dissolved the machine gun companies in both Panzergrenadier regiments and combined them with the heavy weapons companies, the company numbers were changed. As a result of that, the companies of the SPW-Bataillon also had to be renumbered on 16 June 1944. Instead of the 11. to 14. (gep.) Kompanien, the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was made up of the 9. to 12. (gep.) Kompanien.

The battalion commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 4 June 1944. His adjutant was SS-Obersturmführer Edward Gührs, his communications officer SS-Untersturmführer Heinrich Meyburg. The commanders of the 9., 10., 11., and 12. (gep.) Kompanien were the veteran SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt, Georg Preuß and Gerd Babick and SS-Hauptsturmführer Otto Dinse. Because of his 56 confirmed days in close combat, Dinse had been recommended for the Nahkampfspange in Gold; all of the other company commanders wore the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Nahkampfspange in Silver. There were many noncommissioned officers and men in the SPW-Bataillon who were highly decorated for their bravery and their uninterrupted time in the front lines. As representative of them is the 21-year-old SS-Rottenführer Werner Kindler of the 12. Kompanie, who had been awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, the Nahkampfspange in Silver, the Wound Badge in Gold and the Infantry Assault Badge. Another soldier was an SPW driver in the 9. Kompanie, SS-Rottenführer Fritz Karg, who was decorated with both classes of the Iron Cross, the Nahkampfspange and the Panzerkampfabzeichen in bronze. 31

In the middle of May 1944 a few graduates of the 11th War Reserve Cadet Course at the SS-Panzergrenadier School at Kienschlag were transferred to the SPW-Bataillon. They were the SS-Standartenoberjunker Fritz Böcker, Alois Brandmaier, Klaus Rehm, Alfred Reisch and Wolfgang Lüdecke. Böcker had been the first sergeant in Guhl's Company, which was also Rehm's outfit, while the 20-year-old Brandmaier came from the former 13. Kompanie. Lüdecke had been the senior sergeant for the battalion staff. SS-Standartenoberjunker Luis Brandmaier, who had been transferred to his old company (the renumbered 11.), wrote in a letter from the field on 31 May 1944:

Our school has been over for four weeks, and instead of the 14 days leave ordered by the Reichsführer, we were pulled out of our train at the last minute and sent here. What I had scarcely hoped for has happened – not only am I back at the battalion, but I'm even in my old company! You can maybe imagine my joy when I found a pair of the old timers still here! Now I command the 2nd platoon, and I am trying to apply what I

learned and make something like the old 13. Kompanie out of this somewhat sorry bunch.

My colleagues for this purpose: Oberjunker Rehm, Oberjunker Brandmaier, Hauptscharführer Braasch and Oberscharführer Woitsch. Commander of this mess: Obersturmführer Babick. Powerful colleague, screamer and first sergeant: Harnoth. Other helpers: Two familiar noncommissioned officers and a number of unfamiliar ones are also a help, as well as many Rottenführer and Sturmmänner acting as noncommissioned officers. The sufferers (author: recruits) are: elements of the HJ Division as well as recruits from six weeks to 16 months service from every imaginable unit. But they are all volunteers and are mostly still interested in the service and want to learn.

Obviously, men like Molt, Beiersdorf, etc. are no longer to be found, but we have to do what we can. At least the grenadier platoons now have SPW and the driving school is once again active driving (to pick up uniforms). Once again everything is moving fast, almost like old times in France, except that this time I'm no longer one of the sufferers, but in one of the command positions.

Starting in May 1944 the company trains were removed from the companies and consolidated in a battalion-level supply company. Each battalion received a supply company, and SS-Hauptsturmführer Siegfried Wendt took command of the one for the SPW-Bataillon. According to the new tables of organization and equipment, the 9. to 11. (gep.) Kompanien each consisted of 3 officers, 36 noncommissioned officers, and 144 men. The 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie was composed of 2 officers, 29 noncommissioned officers and 95 men.

SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper commanded and led his Panzer regiment by his markedly strong personality. At the time he was numbered among the most charismatic leaders of the Waffen-SS. His behavior both on and off duty, inasmuch as there was any off-duty time during this fifth year of the war, was exemplary. SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller of the 7. Panzer-Kompanie remembered his commander:

At the time Peiper was, in my humble opinion, the most highly educated senior officer in our division, literally as well as figuratively. My otherwise very reserved company commander, Werner Wolff, talking about his period of service as adjutant of the SPW-Bataillon, once described his frequent long discussions with Peiper, which could be regarded as private tutoring on every aspect of a general education. Since he always required proper behavior from his officers, it stands to reason that he was no advocate of so-called stag parties. Human weaknesses of any kind, even when alcohol was involved, awoke his displeasure and he reacted accordingly.

At the end of the period of reorganization in the Hasselt area, the noncommissioned officer corps organized a festive social event to which the regimental officers and the commander were invited. An entertainment group for the troops with dance troupe, singer and a small band put on the scheduled show. There was no lack of drink, and many indulged freely. The mood became freer as the evening wore on. Suddenly the curtain parted, and an officer, highly decorated, appeared in a dancer's costume and hazarded a few dance steps in front of the curtain. Thunderous applause. Peiper? His mouth was a straight line, no other reaction. On the following day the poor

dancer was placed on report: confined to quarters and assigned a written report on a tactical problem with a three-day deadline! An episode which was relatively harmless in itself, but which well demonstrated Peiper's dislike for jokes of this kind, especially drinking bouts. Peiper never compromised on conduct. 32

Peiper's influence was also felt in the general way people communicated in the regiment. His former war diarist and then orderly, SS-Oberscharführer Werner Hentschel, wrote:

The relationship of the regimental commander with his officers, noncommissioned officers and enlisted men was excellent. A high value was placed on proper care for all of the men of the regiment He never demanded anything from anybody which he wouldn't do himself. He didn't like raised voices. While visiting a company during the refitting period in May 1944, the company commander acted somewhat brutally to his men. The regimental commander took him to the side and told him to drop the "first sergeant" behavior. Jochen Peiper was an example to all of the men of the regiment. His orders were enthusiastically executed without reservation because everyone knew he would not order any nonsense.

On 1 June1944 war correspondents filmed a newsreel showing elements of the Panther battalion in an assault exercise. Verbal descriptions were recorded for radio transmission, in which some men from the 3. Kompanie were interviewed, including tank commander SS-Unterscharführer Valentin Bersin.

On 1 June 1944 the commander of the 2. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, was awarded the German Cross in Gold for his previous actions in combat. He had destroyed 24 enemy tanks. 33 SS-Hauptscharführer Konrad Heubeck in the 1. Kompanie was decorated with the German Cross in Gold for, among other things, destroying 29 enemy tanks.34 On 4 June 1944 in the Panzer regiment the commander of the 1. Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, and a platoon leader in the 2. Kompanie, SS-Oberscharführer Hans Dauser, were decorated with the Knight's Cross as was the commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl. SS-Brigadeführer Wisch presented the decorations. Werner Poetschke received the Knight's Cross for a counterattack he carried out on the enemy occupied village of Dawidkowce. In taking it, he created the prerequisite for the 1. Panzer-Armee to cross the Niczlawa to the west. The commanding general, Walter Nehring, praised the success of Poetschke in special correspondence. Poetschke at the time had only minimal strength in his Panzergruppe. (See also the description in the chapter entitled Operations of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 without Peiper: February to April 1944.)

During the reorganization in Belgium he commanded the Panther battalion in the absence of Kuhlmann. Werner Poetschke was a hard, aggressive tank commander, who in action always led from the front. His brother, Herbert, an Untersturmführer in the "Hitlerjugend" Division, wrote:

He wasn't one of your glory-seeking daredevils, but rather a commander with a sure feel for the correct tactical use of the men and equipment entrusted to him. From the time in the Polish campaign when he was given command of the 1st armored car platoon of the reconnaissance battalion of the SS-VT of that period, and in all subsequent actions, he was given

reconnaissance missions while in close contact with the enemy. His eight wounds, with the exception of the last one, were almost all wounds to the face ... His hardness on himself allowed him to demand great efforts from his men as well. As a good superior he always had an ear for their personal problems. He had a relationship with Jochen Peiper which bordered on friendship. Peiper said during a conversation with the three of us concerning my assignment to the Panzer regiment: "No, one of you has to stay alive". 35

Hans Dauser, the 36-year-old holder of the Blood Order, had especially distinguished himself as an SS-Oberscharführer in the 2. Panzer-Kompanie at Napadowka on 26 January 1944. Since then he had been promoted to SS-Untersturmführer. He had destroyed 34 enemy tanks so far. His gunner, SS-Sturmmann Werner Axt, contributed significantly to that and received the Iron Cross, 1st Class on 5 May1944.

Peiper's signals section leader, SS-Unterscharführer Willy Micheluzzi, described the end of the reorganization phase in Flanders:

In the middle of June the signals platoon played handball against the officers. Jochen Peiper was playing center forward and I was playing center half, so I had my eye on the commander. The signals platoons lost the game by only one goal, due to an infamous free shot by Otto Becker. After the game Peiper said to me: "Well there, chief of the sneaks, I believe I'm going to have to make you an Untersturmführer, so I won't have to play against you any more". 36

When SS-Hauptsturmführer Nüske was injured in an automobile accident the adjutant of the I. Abteilung, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Gruhle, became Peiper's new regimental adjutant.<sup>37</sup>

# Invasion – In Action at the Scheldt Estuary: 6 to 17 June 1944

On 6 June 1944 the Allies landed on the coast of Normandy. The Germans were not sure where the landing would take place, but considered the canal coast sector from Holland to the mouth of the Loire most likely. Generalfeldmarschall Rommel was given the mission of smashing the landing. His tactics were to use the beaches as the main battle ground and, accordingly, he had coastal defenses constructed and reinforced with bunkers, artillery and many very sophisticated obstacles. The Panzer divisions were to take up ready positions close to the coast, as they were considered to be the most important weapon for repelling the landing. On the other hand, the commander of Panzer Group West, General Geyr von Schweppenburg, was of the opinion that the Panzer divisions should be held back as an operational reserve, since the landing itself could not be prevented. Because of great enemy air superiority, most of the tank forces would only be brought up front at night after it had become clear where the landings would be concentrated. Additionally, Geyr was certain that there would be operational airborne landings and wanted to keep the Panzer divisions back in the woods north of Paris.

In April 1944 Rommel obtained a Führer decision against this concept, which specified that the Panzer divisions were to be employed only with Hitler's agreement. In addition, the Supreme Commander West, Generalfeldmarschall von

Rundstedt had three Panzer divisions assigned directly to him. The corps units and headquarters of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps, along with the Panzer-Lehr-Division and the 12. SS-Panzer-Division "Hitlerjugend", were declared reserve of the Wehrmacht high command on 30 April 1944. Thus the fateful division of strength was created.

German intelligence knew that the invasion would take place in the first week of June 1944. The 6,500 ships of the greatest armada in the history of warfare were launched from England on their way to Normandy in the night of 5 June 1944. At 0015 hours the British began to land northeast of Caen. Although it had been determined that the invasion was in progress and that enemy landings had occurred, The High Command of the Wehrmacht (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht = OKW) was still refusing to release the 12. SS-Panzer-Division "Hitlerjugend" at 1000 hours on 6 June 1944. The High Command was only persuaded to release the "Hitlerjugend" Division at 1430 hours and the I. SS-Panzer-Korps at 1507 hours from their OKW reserve status after many calls and pressure from OB West (Oberbefehlshaber West = Commander-in-Chief West). Even the splendidly equipped and fully armored Panzer-Lehr-Division wasn't allowed to begin its movement to the invasion front until around 1700 hours, after it had already taken casualties from air attack without having yet fired a shot. That division had been positioned 150 kilometers behind the landing beaches. Generalleutnant Speidel, Chief of Staff for Army Group B, expressed an opinion to the OKW at 1700 hours on 6 June that further landings were to be expected and described the landings already made as a "major enemy operation", but not as an invasion.1

After the code word "Blücher" was received by the Leibstandarte on 6 June 1944, it was ready to march after only two and a half hours, but was initially retained in its assembly area. It seemed clear to the men that they would be in action within a few hours. A radio operator man in the 3. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Sturmmann Edmund Martin, wrote to his parents on 7 June 1944:

There has been a great release of tension. The invasion of the continent is in full swing. We are all breathing easier. Even if we are not yet in action, we can still hope that we too will be there in time to give our enemies a blow from which they won't recover. We are working day and night to make sure that our tanks are ready for battle. The exhortation of the Führer to us on the Western Front has given each of us an honorable obligation: Hold our assigned sector to the last man. In measured readiness, we await an attack here. The Anglo-Americans will run into some unpleasant surprises here. This will probably be the high-water mark of the war. This battle will decide how the war will end. Don't worry about me, everything is going to be all right ... <sup>2</sup>

While the German divisions already at the invasion front were involved in heavy fighting with enemy forces, numerous divisions sat around doing nothing in other areas of France and Belgium. Since the Foreign Armies West Directorate expected an additional landing in the Pas de Calais area, the Leibstandarte was moved into the area east of Bruges during the night of 9/10 June in order to prevent a landing at the mouth of the Scheldt from breaking through the coastal front. The division was moved into the LXXXIX. Armee-Korps sector but without any

formal command relationship to it. Peiper likewise shifted the Panzer regiment east of the Scheldt. The Panther battalion ordered the motorcycle reconnaissance platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Reiser, to use his platoon as an advance party to mark the route for the overland march. It used pink-colored signposts with a black panther on them.

The road march of the regiment went well, and there were no problems. SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller from the 7. Kompanie reported:

10 June 1944. The company started to move in the early morning hours. Objective: the Brügge – Ghent area. The battalion lined up just beyond Genk. But things don't go so easily with green troops. A few young tank drivers who were only trained in turretless hulls were unable to estimate march distances between vehicles or were exhausted in a few hours. They weren't used to the heat generated by the transmission, and the limited viewing area afforded by the driver vision blocks overwhelmed them. Tank commanders used to driving had to take their places as a result.

We went from Hasselt through St. Truiden, Tienen, and Leuven and, in the late afternoon, passed to the south of Brussels. The crossroads pointing to Waterloo gave us no qualms. We continued to roll towards the west. From time to time there was a maintenance halt which forced the tired crew members dozing on the back of the tanks to climb off of them ... Narrow curved roads, and dead-tired drivers, most of whom had been hanging on to the steering bar for 24 hours, couldn't put up with much more. The road surfaces were already being torn up and the corners of houses dinged up in small villages. We couldn't go on much further because the drivers were really at the end of their strength. Finally, the battalion guides shepherded us into the small village of Ursel. The platoons bivouacked at widely separated locations. Because of the danger of air attack, the crews had to remain close to their vehicles, which were concealed under trees and in the shadows of houses. An air-raid warning detail was posted in a windmill on the south west flank of the village.4

For the next few days the company remained on alert there. Peiper was very concerned about a bridge. He requested Flak protection for it, but in vain. The bridge was destroyed in a bombing attack, something Peiper had wanted to prevent. <sup>5</sup> All combat-ready elements of the division were shifted into the area east of Brügge. The SPW-Bataillon received orders: "In the event of enemy landing at the mouth of the Scheldt, you are to prevent the rupture of the coastal front by an immediate counterattack. Secondary mission: Operations against enemy airborne landings."

SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 passed through Lommel – Geel – Westerlo – Bosch – Mechlen – Termonde – Zaffelare – Oosteeklo – Kaprijke to reach Ijzendijke. The Leibstandarte took up positions south of the mouth of the Scheldt, with the I. (Panther) Abteilung of the Panzer regiment located southeast of Knokke-Heist and the II. Abteilung in the area of Ursel. The SPW-Bataillon took up positions in the area of St. Margriete and covered the Leopold Canal along the Kaprijke – Ijzendijke road. Ijzendijke was already on Dutch territory. The division held a line in the area Ursel – Maldegem – Aardenburg (SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1); Oostburg – Schoondijke – Ijzendijke (SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2); Biervleit –

Terneuzen (SS-Panzerpionier-Bataillon 1); and, Zelzate - Eeklo.

The SPW and other vehicles were camouflaged against air observation and, in some cases, dug in. They began to scout the potential operational area for an enemy landing from the sea. In the tank companies the crews painted their tanks with green, yellow and brown camouflage colors.

On 16 June 1944 SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff was married in Knesselare (not in Ursel on 15 June as reported in the divisional history). As instructed by Sepp Dietrich, Wolff had his 19-year-old fiancé brought back to Belgium from Memel by his gunner. Werner Wolff married his Helga in a tastefully decorated white chateau. The divisional judge advocate, SS-Hauptsturmführer Jochum, carried out the ceremony. A string quartet provided a suitable atmosphere and the regimental commander Jochen Peiper was toastmaster. The married couple sat opposite Peiper and Jochum. Helga Wolff remembered:

Knight's Cross winner SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl, our witnesses, Knight's Cross winner SS-Obersturmführer Wendorff and SS-Obersturmführer Benoni Junker and one or two other officers sat on small chairs which were arranged around a table. And somehow it happened that Peiper, pretending to be very serious, asked them all in turn how many children they had. They all had only one or two, or perhaps no children at all. Then Peiper said, "Gentlemen, I fear for your chances of promotion – I have three!" And everyone laughed.

The personal impression that Wolff's young wife gained of Jochen Peiper in those days would certainly be of interest to the reader:

Although I had heard a lot about him, I met him for the first time in person in June 1944. He seemed very young to me. I thought: If I had seen him in shorts, I would have thought he was still a school boy. To me, his appearance didn't seem to correspond at all to the considerable reputation which he had won as a soldier. But I liked him from the outset. His gestures and his words were always militarily curt. But if you didn't let yourself be deceived by this curtness, he could also laugh warmly and from the heart. Otherwise, I don't believe that he would have found such a fine wife. I believe that in the depths of his being, as odd as it may sound, Peiper was very modest and sometimes even shy. When a Belgian farmer's wife once sent him a basket of apples at his quarters - the way Werner explained it to me - he simply said: "But I can't take these people's fruit and eat all of it!" And when his men once made up a serenade for him, to the tune of a very popular melody but with the rewritten text "Jochen Peiper is our leader ...", it almost seemed to embarrass him.8

As well as Wolff, Peiper also had his wife with him during this period. Mrs. Wolff remembers an amusing incident which casts a light on Peiper's streak of humor:

Sigurd Peiper had also just arrived to visit her husband, and one afternoon the two of them invited us for coffee. We had just sat down at the coffee table when Peiper stood back up and asked to be excused for a short time. When he came back into the room he was wearing a spotless white uniform and hissed at Werner with a glare: "You dog, this is for upstaging me so badly in Hasselt!" Peiper then tried to be serious about it for a while, but finally they both broke down in laughter without letting us know why.

Not until we were on our way home, did Werner tell me that a few German officers, including Peiper and my husband, were invited one evening to a very elegant Belgian party. Werner was in a real hurry while he was changing clothes for that evening. In addition to everything else, a button flew off of his uniform jacket. As he was no good at sewing and he had no one to help him and didn't want to arrive late, he grabbed the white uniform which was hanging in the closet, without realizing that this could have amusing consequences.

The elegant Belgian ladies considered the man in the white uniform to be the "highest rank present" and gave him clear preference over the others. Werner could only give Peiper a couple of helpless and apologetic glances, but for the entire evening played the role of the "top dog". And now Peiper took his revenge at the coffee table. 9

The Wolff's lived in Ursel in the house of the Catholic priest. Often, in the evening, SS-Obersturmführer Wolff would sit with the priest over a bottle of red wine and discuss all manner of subjects. <sup>10</sup>

On 17 June 1944 a high and rare award was presented to SS-Obersturmführer Sepp Armberger, commander of the 8. Panzer-Kompanie. The Viennese was named in the Honor Roll of the German Army and decorated with the Honor Roll Clasp. Armberger earned his decoration while detached from the Panzer regiment. In March 1944, under Generalleutnant Püchler, he took command of a Kampfgruppe consisting of some 700 soldiers of the Army and Waffen-SS in Stanislau and distinguished himself during an attack on his own initiative in Podpieczary and Podluze on 30 March 1944. 11 Along with his 8. Panzer-Kompanie, there were also men of the 5. Panzer-Kompanie involved, among them SS-Untersturmführer Ludwig and Zimmermann. The tank crews who had fought as grenadiers in Stanislau were decorated with the Infanteriesturmabzeichen (Infantry Assault Badge) in Bronze. 12 Armberger, the former Flak platoon leader, received the Nahkampfspange in Bronze, the Infanteriesturmabzeichen in Bronze and the Wound Badge in Gold.

During the period on the Scheldt SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann, commander of the Panther battalion, drove to Knokke with his orderly officer to be shown the mine fields by the coastal command. On the way back they tested the abilities of their Schwimmwagen in a flooded area, which ended in wet feet for both. <sup>13</sup>

On 19 June 1944 SS-Standartenoberjunker Luis Brandmaier, who commanded the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 after SS-Obersturmführer Babick was injured in a fall from a horse and, until SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt could return, wrote:

You can bet the farm that we have left our shabby old quarters. For 14 days we have been located at the end of the earth. The enemy's main thrust was supposed to be stopped there – or maybe paratroopers were going to jump directly on top of us – but so far nothing has happened. You can well imagine that all the enthusiasm for action has died down. In a few days, however, we will again leave this hospitable region. Rumors are flying about going to an area where we once were two years ago. Now, that wouldn't be so bad, would it?

Guhl was in command of the battalion. He has finally received his Knight's Cross. Moreover we have been given the number of his old company. Dinse commands his old bunch again, as do the others, Preuß and Schmidt.

The Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment was ready but inactive and the expected enemy landings at the Pas de Calais did not take place. The German divisions fighting on the invasion front since 6 June 1944, among them the Leibstandarte's sister division the "Hitlerjugend", badly needed reinforcements. The quiet period on the Scheldt for the Leibstandarte ended on 17 June 1944, and the units were loaded onto trains at the railroad stations in Eeklo, Maldegem, St. Kruis and Moerkeke. The Panther battalion entrained in Maldegem, east of Brügge.

A few elements of the Panzer regiment, however, remained in the Hasselt area on 19 June and were not moved to Normandy. A training company was formed in the monastery school at Zonhoven, which was organized into platoons for commanders, gunners, radio operators and drivers. <sup>14</sup> The British Air Force was systematically bombing railroad stations, rail lines and other transportation nodes in France, and these attacks increased once the British found out that the Leibstandarte was on its way to Normandy. The Leibstandarte's transport trains took different routes and unloaded at different places.

The commanders of the I and II. Abteilungen of the Panzer regiment and all the adjutants traveled separately by wheeled vehicles to Normandy and not on the trains. The regimental adjutant, SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Gruhle, traveled with the adjutant of the I. (Panther) Abteilung, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, in a Kfz. 15, without a driver or lights to the detraining area at Dreux – Evreux. <sup>15</sup> The orderly officer of the I. Abteilung likewise traveled ahead of the trains with his car to St. Germain and Versailles. <sup>16</sup>

The trains carrying the I. Abteilung of the Panzer regiment detrained north of Paris in railroad stations in the area south of Beauvais, Compiègne and les Thilliers-en-Vexin. SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann's command post was located in Evreux. 17 On 18 June the 3. Kompanie was unloaded outside of Amiens. 18 The 5. Kompanie entrained on 18 June 1944 in Maldegem and the SPW-Bataillon in Eeklo. The 1st Platoon of the 7. Panzer-Kompanie was the last element loaded on the trains. It was loaded with the 6. Kompanie. For that platoon the trip went north of Brussels through Leuven - Tirlemont -Namur - Dinant. On the next day it went through Longuvon (Lothringen) - Mars-la-Tour - Pont-a-Mousson. On the following day the train rolled through Toul – Bar le Duc – Vitry-le-Francois - Vaires-sur-Marne - Versailles - St. Cyr-l'Ecole. After unloading, the elements of the 6. and 7. Kompanien began their march through Millemont into the Forêt des Quatres Pilliers, where they found other elements of the II. Abteilung already in place. 19

The concealment of the movement of the tanks and the tanks themselves from aerial observation was a success. Wooded terrain was bombed on several occasions when there weren't any tanks there. The destruction of the Leibstandarte's tanks was reported several times during this period on English radio. 20 When schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 moved by road out of the area of Gournay-en-Bray west of Beauvais to the invasion front, it traveled through Paris on 7 June 1944. Around midnight, English bombers plowed up garden plots near the Palace of Versailles but didn't hit the Tigers of the 2. Kompanie which were located there. On the next day the enemy radio at Calais

reported, "... the bloodhound Wittmann and his Tigers were destroyed at Versailles." <sup>21</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer Hermann Kahl and Rolf Reiser of the I. Abteilung of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 were ordered to report to SS-Obergruppenführer and General der Waffen-SS Sepp Dietrich, who asked them about the progress being made by the Panther battalion. <sup>22</sup> Movement took place only at night because of the danger of air attack. During the day the tank companies took shelter in patches of woods, camouflaging themselves. <sup>23</sup> Jochen Peiper went by staff car, as the entire regimental staff and headquarters company were moved overland to the front with the tanks.

One of the trains for the 3. Kompanie hit a mine near Maubeuge and the explosion knocked two cars with Panthers on them off the rails. The trip continued after a delay of one day. The Panthers crossed the Seine at night by ferry and continued on their way. <sup>24</sup> The first elements of the division unloaded west of Paris. The 5. Panzer-Kompanie went by train via Maubeuge – St. Quentin – Tergnier – Laon – Reims and unloaded in Paris on 21 June. <sup>25</sup> SS-Sturmmann Heinz Hänze of the 5. Kompanie remembered:

Then another one died when we stopped at the Versailles Railroad Station. The comrade, whose name I no longer remember, climbed on to a turret, slipped and fell against the overhead electric line. Naturally, he stayed hanging there. Our first sergeant, Oberscharführer Wien, tried to pull him off with a wool blanket and got an electric shock but fortunately wasn't really hurt. But the man hanging on the lines didn't fall from the tank until the current was cut off. <sup>26</sup>

The main body of the II. Abteilung moved along National Route 12 via Dreux and Nonancourt to Tillières-sur-Avre. The following night witnessed the battalion rolling through L'Aigle into some woods behind Nonant. SS-Junker Karl Zumpe described the march of the 6. Kompanie:

As we absolutely had to find someplace before daybreak to get under cover, we took cover under some roadside trees. Then we made ourselves comfortable in a cellar during the day, which had a few kegs of hard cider in it. We were acquainted with this drink along with the Calvados schnapps from the days we spent in Normandy in the fall of 1942. I was happier with a beautiful cherry tree, which was loaded with ripe fruit. When we had gotten off the road at the first light of dawn, we moved into an orchard with the tanks. The owner invited us to eat the fruit, and when I offered him my ration of canteen cigars and cigarettes in exchange, I was able to get his entire harvest of fruit.

A woods made a deep impression on us during this march to the front. While still dark, we drove into a cathedral of old oaks. Unwittingly, we had moved back into ancient times. This peaceful stillness made an extraordinary impression on me, and its effect is hard to put into words. Those tall trunks radiated strength and majestic dignity; we only spoke softly in their presence.<sup>27</sup>

During the next night march the II. Abteilung moved along N 24 through Argentan, which was on fire, and took shelter in the fruit orchards north of the city. The following night, it reached Falaise on N 158, and then turned into the division's assembly area in the large Cinglais Forest to the west. This was 2 July 1944. <sup>28</sup> The I. Abteilung had also pulled in there. The 3. Kompanie had been in the woods at Berbery since 30 June.

# In Action in Normandy: 30 June to 20 August 1944

On 23 June 1944 the divisional staff moved to La Bagitteère, 20 kilometers to the southeast of Caen. The division completed its movement by the end of 6 July 1944. The entire division lay within the protective concealment of this extensive wooded area there. From the assembly area of the Panzer regiment, a radio operator from the 3. Kompanie, SS-Sturmmann Edmund Martin, wrote:

It is now only a matter of hours before the attack begins. We are located in a woods near the front, in a well-camouflaged assembly area. We can hear powerful artillery fire such as we seldom heard in Russia. Units of the enemy air forces are constantly cruising over us and are never absent for more than a half hour, day or night. The enemy strafes any target which shows itself with its on-board weapons, even firing at individuals. Once in a while they drop bombs. But we still haven't taken any losses in the company. The fighting in the west has an entirely different character than fighting in the east. There we could pay attention mostly to the ground fighting, but here we have to take into account the new factor of overwhelming enemy air superiority, which is certainly going to make it hard for us. But it is already certain that the enemy will go down in defeat.

But they still had to wait before going into action. The tanks were dug in within the Cinglais Forest. On 3 July 1944 SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 reached the Forêt de Breteuil, on 4 July Vimoutiers, on 5 July Courcy and, on the following day, Bretteville le Rabet - Quesnay - Ouilly le Tasson - Tassily east of the N 158, running from Caen to Falaise. While the assembly of the division was still in progress on 28 June 1944, the staff and the I. and II. Bataillone of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 were moved forward to Venoix, just west of Caen. At noon the battalions attacked on both sides of the Caen -Villers-Bocage road with the objective of Mouen, in order to cut off enemy forces at Tourville which had advanced across the Odon. Verson and Mouen were reached against heavy resistance. The following day was marked by heavy English counterattacks. The engaged elements of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 were positioned in Verson, Eterville and Maltot. The British-Canadian attack on Caen began on 7 July 1944 with a heavy bombing attack on the sorely tried city. The command post of SS-Obersturmbannführer Frey's SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 was located west of Caen.

The attitudes of the French civilian population towards the British/American invaders are described by SS-Rottenführer Traugott Schmidt of the headquarters company of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1:

On 7 July we were in Venoix, a suburb of Caen, in a group of houses which had been leveled on a low hill. From there you could look out over Caen. Towards 2200 hours, bombers approached at low level, about 500 of them with corresponding fighter cover. According to Allied sources they dropped 2500 tons of bombs. The effect on the civilian population was frightful. The 8.8 cm Flak guns of the HJ Division shot down one bomber, which tried to crash with its bomb load on the Flak position, about 300m away from us, but they missed. After this bomber had gone up in flames, the civilians in our vicinity left their shelters to clap in frenetic applause and shout "meurtier" (murderer).<sup>2</sup>

The English used 456 of their bombers in this attack, which dropped 2276 tons of bombs on the suffering city. About 400 people lost their lives. However, after the bombardment, there was no attack by ground troops. On 8 July 1944 units of the "Hitlerjugend" Division, located to the north and northwest of Caen, and the positions of the Leibstandarte's SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 at Franqueville were attacked by strong enemy forces. A third aerial attack was made on Caen, which once against cost a large number of French lives. An interesting look at the English attitude towards this action was revealed after they took the city. An English captain answering a question by Mrs. Gérard Adam as to the reasons for this senseless bombardment said: "Mademoiselle, for the British General Staff, the life of a single English soldier is worth more than those of thousands of French civilians." 3

During the night of 8/9 July 1944 the I. Bataillon and elements of the II. Bataillon of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 were attached to SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 under Obersturmbannführer Albert Frey and put into action on the bank of the Odon southwest of Caen between le Mesnil and la Grâce de Dieu. The SPW-Bataillon moved further south to St. André sur Orne and became the divisional reserve.<sup>4</sup>

SS-Hauptsturmführer Josef Diefenthal had taken over command shortly before in an unexpected move. He had not belonged to the battalion and, for a long time, had been adjutant to the current divisional commander, SS-Brigadeführer Theodor "Teddy" Wisch, first in his battalion and then in SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl went to the regimental convalescent home in Steinach on the Brenner.<sup>5</sup>

The entire SPW-Bataillon wasn't in the sector on the Orne, as the mortar and cannon platoons of SS-Hauptsturmführer Dinse's 12. (gep.) Kompanie had remained in Chaise Dieu near Verneuil during the march to the front and waited there for their equipment. During the first week of July the long awaited SPW with the 12 cm mortars and six SPW with 7.5 cm antitank cannon arrived and were sighted in by the platoons. During the night of 15/16 July 1944 both platoons, under the command of SS-Hauptscharführer Jochen Thiele, moved up to the invasion front and arrived at the company without losses.<sup>6</sup>

So far, Jochen Peiper's Panzer regiment had not been in action. He summoned his company commanders together for conferences and informed them of the possible areas of employment for the companies and the overall situation of the division. Otherwise, Peiper could only watch the progress of the fighting and put up with the nerve-straining wait as well as he could. On 7 July 1944 SS-Sturmmann Hans Brunkhorst, gunner for Unterscharführer Nagel in the 5. Kompanie, noted in his diary: "Always more of the same. It's becoming increasingly boring ... 9 July: We're still just playing cards – Karl Haas, Erwin, and I."

On 10 July 1944 the elements of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regimenter 1 and 2 located between le Mesnil and Louvigny came under attack from artillery and bombers. Eterville and Maltot were taken by the 43rd British Infantry Division, which quickly occupied Hill 112. During this action the III/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 was pushed back into the eastern part of Maltot by English infantry and tank attacks, which gave the enemy a chance to get across the Orne. SS-Obersturmführer Frank Hasse, commander of the 11. Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, recognized this and attacked the enemy

in Maltot from the east. In fierce close combat, Hasse pushed into Maltot with the first of his men and gained ground to the west. Several times English tanks and infantry attacked the 11. Kompanie, whose men destroyed four tanks. Under continuous artillery fire, Hasse's company had cleared two thirds of the village by 1800 hours. Several Tigers supported his subsequent attack. SS-Obersturmführer Frank Hasse was awarded the Knights Cross for this action on 6 August 1944.

North of Eterville the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade attacked the boundary between the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 at Louvigny. Shortly before midnight, both battalions moved out against the heights of Maltot and Eterville. SS-Rottenführer Traugott Schmidt of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 fought in the Maltot area, and passed on an account of his experiences to posterity in a letter from the field:

Tommy attacked after six hours of heavy artillery bombardment. You could hardly see the sun; everything was gray and black. The ground trembled under the continuous pounding of artillery fire. Then they attacked, thinking that none of us could be left alive. In close combat – man-to-man – they were thrown back with heavy losses. Without artillery support we immediately launched a counterattack through that hell. We gained some ground. We haven't slept for three days and three nights ... in a sector which is mentioned every day in the Wehrmacht Report. That was SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 of the Leibstandarte. Either we win or we die for our country.

By order of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps, the 7. Kompanie of the Panzer regiment was sent to Bully and attached to the II. SS-Panzer-Korps as an operational reserve. SS-Obersturmführer Wolff pulled the company out of the Cinglais Forest at night and moved it forward to the Orne, crossing the river at Pont du Coudray to reach his assigned area at Bully, north of the Orne. The leader of the 1st Platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller, wrote:

The village in front of us – Bully – was under considerable harassing fire. Right after the first few houses, we turned to the right and pulled into an orchard, which was sparsely populated by trees, and spread out. We had to dig in immediately. But how? Only about 30 cm of top soil, then rock. Desperately, the crews grabbed their pickaxes. We dug and chopped for the whole day. The crews had blisters on their hands. We were tired, but bomb attacks in the area of Maltot – Hill 112 – Esquay-Notre-Dame taught us the necessity for digging in. We needed more than two days to really get dug in. Right behind our position the bank dropped steeply to the Orne. It was about a 35 meter drop, and a bit of dead ground turned the narrow road along the bank into a beach safe from artillery fire. 10

Peiper's command post was located in a country estate. He frequently left there to visit units employed at the front. During one of these visits, accompanied by his 2nd orderly, SS-Oberscharführer Werner Hentschel, Peiper observed enemy tank positions through the scissors scope of an artillery observer. Despite that, the Panzer regiment, with the exception of the 7. Kompanie, remained in reserve.

On 11 July 1944 the Leibstandarte was assigned the defensive sector south of the Caen – Falaise national road from South Caen to Maltot, and the "Hitlerjugend" Division, which had been in action continuously since 7 June, was pulled out of the

front. Elements of the LAH fought in the left-hand sector of the division with the 9. SS-Panzer-Division "Hohenstaufen". Around 1000 hours Eterville was retaken by the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 in a counterattack, but was lost again around 1415 hours to an attack by 60 enemy tanks. Eterville was taken back in the evening by the I. And II. Bataillone of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1. In St.-André-sur-Orne, the SPW-Bataillon lost SS-Untersturmführer Albert Baur and three other men. The commander of the 9. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt, and 12 men were wounded. 11

On the evening of 12 July the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was shifted to Vieux, south of Maltot, and attached directly to the corps. Like most of the Panzer regiment, the tanks in the 8. Kompanie, commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Sepp Armberger, were also inactive in their ready positions. SS-Sturmmann Alois Pumberger remembered: "In the forest, we dug in under the tanks. The side skirts were removed and placed in front of the running gear. We were under continuous enemy artillery fire during the next few days, so that we had a lot of losses because of damaged tracks and suspensions." <sup>12</sup>

Nothing of any importance happened during the following two days with those elements engaged. The SPW-Bataillon suffered two killed on 12 July 1944, including the leader of the 1st Platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Fritz Bocker, and seven wounded. On 13 July the battalion was bombed and strafed several times by ground-support fighters. Until that point in time, the Panzer regiment had only lost two killed in action. <sup>13</sup>

On 14 July 1944 SS-Sturmmann Edmund Martin, radio operator in SS-Unterscharführer Bersin's Panther of the 3./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was wounded. That same day he wrote his parents:

I felt that I was going to get hit in this operation ... Yesterday afternoon, I was the first man in the company to be wounded by a shell exploding right in front of me. I was hit by shrapnel. One went through the nasal passage into the right eye and damaged the optic nerve ... All I know is that I will no longer be able to see out of the right eye ... Don't worry about me too much, and don't complain. A lot of others have made greater sacrifices than just one dumb eye. 14

The Leibstandarte was relieved by the 272. Infanterie-Division and moved into the area south of Caen between Ifs and Cintheaux. As part of its regrouping on 15 July, the LAH occupied new positions on both sides of the N 158, which ran in a straight north/south line from Caen to Falaise. During the night of 16/17 July 1944 the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 occupied the areas it was assigned east of the N 158. The companies set up in the wooded area and the hedgerows south/southeast of Secqueville. The Panthers were carefully camouflaged and the tank crews dug in under their tanks to protect themselves against the continuous bombing attacks and the fire of naval artillery. Radio silence was ordered; communications were maintained by runners and, later, through telephone lines. Jochen Peiper's regimental command post was set up in the small castle at Garcelles-Secqueville.

Elements of the Panzer regiment, such as the 5. and 7. Kompanien, didn't move east until later, however, and even the SPW-Bataillon remained in St. André for awhile, even though its 10. Kompanie moved to Percauville. The 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 had dug in its tanks in Viecux, and the crews burrowed out their fox holes in the ground beneath their tanks. The

company had been located there since the night of 13 July 1944 as an operational reserve without firing a shot. "We can't keep having it this easy. Tommy is slinging a lot of heavy arty our way" wrote SS-Sturmmann Hans Brunkhorst. 15

The 2nd Platoon of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, led by SS-Untersturmführer Günter Pflughaupt, was attached to the 9. SS-Panzer-Division "Hohenstaufen" on 16 July 1944 and attacked Baron across the north face of Hill 112. SS-Sturmmann Matthias Handwerk participated in the attack as a radio operator in the platoon leader's tank, along with Gunner SS-Unterscharführer Frieb, the driver Thau, and the loader, presumably Steinhardt:

Towards 1130 hours, Pflughaupt ordered the attack on Hill 112 by radio. In spite of a protest over the radio that our company commander Streipart was still at an orders group, he ordered us to move out without Streipart. When we had almost reached the hill without even having fired a shot, there was a jolt and immediately afterwards a second one. We had taken two hits in the engine compartment. Emil Frieb had scarcely yelled, "bail out!" when we were wrapped in flames standing in our hatches. Emil Frieb and Leo Thau got out first; they weren't wounded. The loader leapt to the ground, just like I did. He had been hit by shrapnel because he had blood coming out of his mouth and nose. I was able to still see that. Then I yelled for Leo Thau, as I could hardly see anything because of burns on my face. My hands were also somewhat baked.

Then with Leo I ran down the sunken road half staggering and moaning, when suddenly a machine gun rattled. We hit the deck; Leo's right arm was hit. We had hardly raised our heads and there were already two Tommies standing in front of us with fixed bayonets. They cried out: "Hands up!" Our friends had let us roll over them earlier. They greeted us with the appropriate rage. We were then taken to some houses nearby and stood against a wall. A machine gun was set up, and then there was a lot of talk. Apparently, they couldn't agree as to whether or how they were to kill us. These were anxious minutes for the pair of us, and many thoughts of home shot rapidly through our minds. Then an officer arrived and ordered us to be given first aid. Immediately afterwards, an ambulance showed up and took us to a casualty station. 16

SS-Sturmmann Heinz Hänze, the radio operator for SS-

Unterscharführer Trepper, reported from the perspective of his tank:

At about 12:00 hours, we drove up the hill without enemy opposition, until we were greeted by a hail of fire from the small patch of woods there. Even so, Pflughaupt continued the advance, until the first tank was in flames. In a matter of minutes, the platoon leader's tank had suffered the same fate. The crew was able to bail out however and, through the vision block, I saw Pflughaupt's driver, Rottenführer Wisura, run towards our tank. He exchanged a few words with my commander which I didn't understand, and then ran back to his tank. In this short period – a span of no more than five minutes – the rest of the tanks had also been put out of action. When I bailed out and stood on the track cover, I saw an enemy infantryman aiming at me with his rifle from a distance of some 20 meters. And in this instance I had to grant my enemy a sense of "fair play", as he was aiming his piece at my legs. I jumped off the tank and low crawled away from it, because it could have blown up at any moment. 17

All four tanks were destroyed within a few minutes on Hill 112. In addition to Pflughaupt, the tanks were commanded by SS-Unterscharführer Wellmann and Trepper. Tank "501" belonging to the company commander also participated. The tank commanders and the bulk of the soldiers were taken prisoner. Jochen Peiper was at the command post of SS-Panzer-Regiment 9 "Hohenstaufen" command post where SS-Sturmmann Heinz Hänze reported in and briefed the failed attack to Peiper. Peiper, infuriated at the casualties, threatened a court-martial investigation for Pflughaupt. <sup>18</sup> "Almost no one made it back; most of them were surely taken prisoner; and many were dead. We moved back to the line of departure. Morale was below freezing." reported SS-Sturmmann Brunkhorst of the 5. Kompanie in his diary on that Sunday.

The 7. Kompanie, under SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff, was still in Bully as a corps reserve and the men saw how badly Hill 112 was plowed under with bombs. Wolff was tortured by impatience; he was constantly on the go in his Schwimmwagen to scout out favorable areas for his company to go into action. He escaped a bomber attack on Caen, leaving the city at the last minute. The company moved east during the night of 18/19 July 1944.

#### SS-Panzerregiment 1

Commander:

SS-Ostubaf. Jochen Peiper

Adjutant:

SS-Hstuf. Hans Gruhle

1st Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Kurt Köchlin 2nd Orderly: SS-Oscha. Werner Hentschel 3rd Orderly:SS-Ustuf. Georg Adam

Signals Officer:

SS-Ostuf. Helmut Jahn

Surgeon:

SS-Stubaf. Dr. Kurt Sickel

# As of 13 July 1944

Headquarters Company Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Rudi Mäule

Combat Reconnaissance Platoon Leader:

SS-Ustuf. Erich Münkemer

Terrain Reconnaissance Scout Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Rolf Ziege, SS-Oscha. Karl Köhnen Flak Platoon Leader: SS-Hscha. Paul Schröder

Combat Engineer Platoon Leader: SS-Oscha Karch Messenger Section Leader: SS-Uscha. Hans Popetschnig

Transport Officer (II): SS-Ustuf. Erwin Nau Maintenance Officer: Ostuf. Rudi Mäule Additionally Assigned Officers:

SS-Ostuf. Dr. Martin Denker

SS-Ostuf. Gerd Jahn

SS-Ustuf. Richard Herrmann

SS-Hscha. Konrad Heubeck

Regimental Engineer: SS-Hstuf. Erich Strohschön Administrative Officer: SS-Hstuf. Ernst Drube Finance Officer: SS-Ustuf. Günter Hoppe

Dentist: SS-Ostuf. Dr. Emil Kraft

# I. (s.)/SS-Panzerregiment 1

Commander:

SS-Stubaf. Herbert Kuhlmann

Adjutant:

SS-Ustuf. Arndt Fischer

1st Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Hermann Kahl Surgeon: SS-Hstuf. Dr. Rudolf Neumayer

Additional Assigned Officer: SS-Hstuf. Werner Poetschke

Headquarters Company Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Otto Knuflock

Combat Reconnaissance Platoon Leader:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Hennecke

Terrain Reconnaissance Scout Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Rolf Reiser

Flak Platoon Leader: SS-Oscha. Otto Forstner Signals Platoon Leader: SS-Uscha Helmut Pönisch Maintenance Officer: SS-Ustuf. Otto Ibenthal Battalion Engineer: SS-Ostuf. Horst Gülden Administrative Officer: SS-Ostuf. Dr. Rolf Jergus

# As of 13 July 1944

#### 1. Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Freidrich Christ

SS-Hstuf. Werner Poetschke

I. Platoon:

SS-Ostuf. Karl Kremser

II. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Müller

III. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Karl-Heinz Fernau

SS-Ustuf. Hans Hennecke

#### 2. Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Hans Malkomes

I. Platoon:

SS-Ostuf. Jupp Bosbach SS-Ustuf. Hubert Kaufmann

II. Platoon: III. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Dauser

# 3. Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Hstuf. Heinz Sachse

I. Platoon: II. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Herbert Junker SS-Ustuf. Albert Möller

III. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Hans-Jürgen Bahrendt

#### 4. Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Hstuf. Ernst Otto

I. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Joachim Sünderhauff

II. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Theo Führlinger

III. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Walter Torns

# II. (m.)/SS-Panzerregiment 1

Commander: SS-Stubaf. Heinz Kling Adjutant: SS-Ustuf. Helmut Schäfer

1st Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Alfred Mühlenbach

Surgeon: Unknown

Temporarily Assigned to the Division:

SS-Ostuf. Werner Sternebeck

Headquarters Company Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Waldemar Vollert

Combat Reconnaissance Platoon Leader:

SS-Ustuf. Karl Schmalzer

Terrain Reconnaissance Scout Platoon:

SS-Ostuf. Josef Giggenbach

Flak Platoon Leader: Unteroffizier Hans Brückner Signals Platoon Leader: SS-Uscha Klaus Fick Transportation Officer (II): SS-Ostuf. Otto Scherer

SS-Ustuf. Rudi Grosser

Administrative Officer: SS-Ostuf. Kurt Christke

# As of 17 July 1944

**Assigned Special Duties:** 

SS-Ustuf. Karl-Heinz Mohrmann

SS-Ustuf. Erich Madel

#### 5. Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Fritz Streipart

I. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Karl Ludwig

II. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Paul Blohm

III. Platoon:

SS-Hscha. Heinz Mohrmann SS-Oscha. Theo Jensen

IV. Platoon: S

#### 6. Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Benoni Junker

I. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Rattenhuber

II. Platoon:

SS-Ostuf. Wolfgang Häcker

III. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Frans Piesinger

IV. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Theo Jensen

#### 7. Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Werner Wolff

I. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Gerard Stiller

II. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Kurt Sametreiter

III. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Steininger

IV. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Werner Kothmann

#### 8. Kompanie

Company Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Sepp Armberger I. Platoon: SS-Ustuf

SS-Ustuf. Bruno Randt

II. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Kurt Sametreiter

III. Platoon:

SS-Hscha. Fritz Dumek

IV. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Helmut Schröter

#### 9. Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Erich Rumpf

I. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Herbert Gauglitz

II. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Günter Leifheit

III. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Walter Böhm

Flame Thrower Platoon: ...

#### **Maintenance Company**

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Wilhelm Ratschko Special Duties Officer: SS-Ostuf. Gerhard Maiwald

Ordnance Specialist: SS-Ostuf. Erwin Bacher

Shop Foreman, 1 Platoon: SS-Ostuf. Werner Stöckel Shop Foreman, 2 Platoon: SS-Ostuf. Julius Porupski Recovery Platoon Leader: SS-Oscha. Kurt Zimmerimann

#### **Transportation Company** / SS-Pz. Rgt. 1

Company Commander:

SS-Ustuf. Karl Petersen

I. Platoon:

SS-Hscha. Kurt Habermann

II. Platoon:

Unknown

# Supply & Services Company / SS-Pz. Rgt. 1

Company Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Rudolf Höcker

# III. (gep.)/SS-Pz. Gren. Rgt. 2

Commander:

SS-Hstuf. Jupp Diefenthal

SS-Hstuf. Otto Dinse (effective 7 August 1944)

Adjutant:

SS-Ostuf. Erhard Gührs

1st Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Wolfgang Lüdecke

2nd Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Walter Kern

Signals Officers:

SS-Ustuf. Heinrich Meyburg (KIA: 11 July 1944)

SS-Oscha. Rolf Hatzfeld

Additionally Assigned Officers:

SS-Ustuf. Bernd von Bergmann

SS-Ustuf. Albert Baur (KIA: 11 July 1944)

SS-Ustuf. Alfred Reisch

SS-Ustuf. Heinrich Stahl

SS-Ustuf. Wilfried Gryzbeck

Headquarters Company Commander:

SS-Hstuf. Siegfried Wandt

Staff Surgeon: Dr. Eberhard Lucknow

Surgeons: Dr. Willibald Dittmann

Dr. Karl Lorenz

Transportation Officer:

SS-Ustuf. Heinz Wermuth (KIA: 4.9.1944)

Administrative Officer: SS-Ustuf. Ewald Ogertschnigg

I-Platoon: SS-Oscha. Landau

# 9. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Hans Schmidt (KIA: 7 August 1944) Platoon Leaders: SS-Ustuf. Deiter Kohler

SS-Hscha. Max Leike

#### As of 1 July 1944

#### 10. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Georg Preuß

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Fritz Böcker (KIA: 12 July 1944)

SS-Oscha. Gerhard Manß

SS-Oscha. Karl Kaspari (KIA: 24 July 1944)

SS-Oscha. Konrad Schmidt

SS-Oscha. Egmont Eichler (KIA: 27 July 1944)

SS-Oscha. Eduard Maron

#### 11. (gep.) Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Heinz Tomhardt

I. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Claus Rehm

II. Platoon:

SS-Ustuf. Alois Brandmaier

III. Platoon:

SS-Hscha. Walter Braasch

IV. Platoon:

SS-Oscha. Alois Woitsch

#### 12. (s.gep.) Kompanie

Company Commander: SS-Hstuf. Otto Dinse

SS-Hstuf. Jochen Theile (effective7 August 1944)

Cannon Platoon: SS-Ustuf. Bernd von Bergmann SS-Uscha. Helmut Feldvoß (effective 19 July 1944)

Combat Engineer Platoon:

SS-Hscha. Wilhelm Haferstroh (KIA: 3 Sept. 1944)

Mortar Platoon:

SS-Oscha. Hans Fuchs

Special Duties Officer:

SS-Hscha. Jochen Thiele

# Operation "Goodwood": 18 to 29 July 1944

During this period the enemy was preparing the "Goodwood" attack with which he hoped to take the area east of the National Route Caen – Falaise: Hubert-Folie – Soliers – Frénouville – Bourguébus. The VIII British Corps wanted to attack to the south from the area of Cagny and take this totally flat terrain, which was suitable tank country, and advance as far towards Falaise as possible. This attack, planned for 18 July 1944, was to be supported by 1056 British bombers, which were to hit the flanks of the attack zone with 5,000 tons of bombs. The US Air Force would bomb the area of Bourguébus – Soliers – Hubert-Folie. This would be the heaviest air support that the Allies had so far provided in Normandy. On 16 July and 17 July British and Canadian corps carried out diversionary attacks across the Orne in the sector between Caen and Amayé sur Orne.

Waves of aircraft began their attack against the German main battle lines and their reserves in the rear on the morning of 18 July 1944. At 0800 hours strong enemy tank forces moved out of Démouville to the south and broke through the main battle line. Towards 1000 hours the point of the English attack had reached the outskirts of Cagny and south of Four and Soliers. The tank thrust towards Bras turned east towards Soliers before reaching the village. At 1000 hours it found itself northeast of Bras, just in front of the railway line to the north. Peiper led his Panther battalion to the north to oppose this strong tank group.

The 2. Kompanie of the Panzer regiment, under SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, assembled at that time in a woods south of Garcelles. In spite of not being completely ready to move out, Malkomes received orders along with the other companies to attack the enemy tanks at Soliers. Immediately, his 13 Panthers moved off towards Bourguébus. While moving north, they came under tank fire from Four, and the first ground support aircraft attacked soon thereafter. The 2. Kompanie reached the gardens and hedges on borh sides of Bourguébus after crossing completely open terrain at 1200 hours. At that point SS-Obersturmführer Malkomes personally led a reconnaissance in force towards Soliers. South and southeast of Soliers he detected about 60 tanks, which had bunched up closely in an attack position on their approach route. Supply vehicles crossed the area. The attack position was covered by 20 tanks in covered firing positions. They were pointed toward Bourguébus.

In spite of his clearly inferior numbers, Malkomes made the bold decision to take advantage of the element of surprise and attack the assembled tanks. His Panthers leapt rapidly forward and the gunners took precise aim at the targets offered. In spite of heavy resistance by the English tanks, and the intervention of artillery fire, the company destroyed 20 tanks and took Soliers.<sup>1</sup>

At noon the Leibstandarte's entire Panther battalion found itself engaged on a broad front between Bras and Bourguébus in a tank battle against English tanks of the 29th Tank Brigade of the 11th Armored Division which were attacking Bras, Hubert-Folie, and Bourguébus. An official English version describes the fighting:

An officer of the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Tank Regiment reported: "The fun began just as the foremost tanks had

advanced to Hubert-Folie. I saw Sherman after Sherman go up in flames This happened so fast that I thought that in another few minutes there would be nothing left of the regiment. I could see the German tanks approaching just beyond and to the west of Hubert-Folie."

Those were the Panthers of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division. A tank battle was under way and, unfortunately, the Germans had the dominant terrain. The first tank was that of the battle group commander of A-Squadron, Major Langdon. It was hit as it moved between Bras and Hubert-Folie. Just before it started to burn, he and his crew were able to bail out, taking a wounded private with them. Next, two more tanks from A Squadron were hit as well as that of the commander, Major Close. An old warrior and firmly committed to advance, he crossed over to a sergeant's tank and told him to get down. The sergeant was just as determined to advance and misunderstood the orders until Major Close pulled out his pistol and in that way got back into the fight. By then it was a disaster! Close could see the rest of the regiment in heavy fighting - at least seven tanks burning - and escaping crews heading back to the embankment.

Major Langdon's crew, under cover with its wounded private, saw a mass of tanks - the B Squadron - move in. Then the powerful guns of the Panthers, which far out-ranged ours, fired on them and destroyed more tanks from our squadron. Those left pulled back behind the embankment. The ammunition in Major Langdon's tank began to explode and he and his crew were forced to leave the trench without losing a moment. It was at least 200 meters to the next cover, an unharvested field, and the intervening terrain had no cover at all. It was dominated by the enemy in Bras and Hubert-Folie. "We picked up the wounded private and carried him across the open ground." They were not fired upon. A parting mercy, as there was no agreement in tank battle - only at sea - that a beaten crew is not to be fired on when they leave their protective armor. On the way back we saw that the Fife and Forfars were also safe on the other side of the Caen - Vimont rail line.2

The 2. Kompanie of schwere Panzer-Abteilung 101 (Tiger) was also fighting in this sector. SS-Unterscharführer Bobby Warmbrunn destroyed a tank. At that point the company commander, SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Helmut Wendorff, climbed into his Tiger and Warmbrunn moved into the gunner's seat. West of Hubert-Folie, above la Guinguette, Wendorff destroyed a tank. While Warmbrunn was aiming at another enemy tank through his optics, the Tiger was hit on the gun mantlet. Although the round didn't penetrate, the tremendous jolt pushed the ocular into Warmbrunn's eye.<sup>3</sup>

The 4./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, under SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto, was fighting with seven Panthers. <sup>4</sup> SS-Panzerschütze Ernst Reicher, loader in SS-Unterscharführer Werner Bernhardt's Panther in the 3. Kompanie, described his first action. In his crew were Felix Roderer from Switzerland as driver, Otto Zufelde as gunner and Mariensee as radio operator:

Because the tanks were widely separated, there was no massed approach. We went into action in line. During a breather in one village, I saw only three or four Panthers near us. After leaving the village, an enemy tank group of five to six tanks came into view over the top of a knoll. After our commander had ordered us to attack I felt a jolt and when I looked to the left, my commander was sitting headless in the turret. The gunner shouted that the cannon wasn't working. After a sudden, short movement backwards, the tank stopped, and we bailed out. The fact that we escaped to the rear was our salvation as the enemy only fired a few tank rounds at us which failed to detonate. They only tore lanes in the grain field. After crossing a knoll, we were out of the firing zone, which was lucky for me as blood was streaming out of my boot. <sup>5</sup>

After Soliers was taken by the 2. Panther Kompanie, under SS-Obersturmführer Malkomes, the English launched an immediate counterattack, which was repelled by the company. Then the enemy laid down intensive artillery fire and attacked Soliers from the north with a formation of 50 tanks positioned along the rail line. Werner Poetschke wrote: 6

In a desperate battle with heavy tank losses, Malkomes' company stood in Soliers - tough and unshaken - and defended itself successfully. In the bitter fighting for Soliers the solid resistance of this company under very heavy enemy fire gave us enough time to establish a new front line. It took advantage of the terrain along the line la Hogue - Tilly. SS-Obersturmführer Malkomes had stabilized the front by the force of his personality. The striking example of his personal bravery was an inspiration to every man in his company, especially at the focal points of the fighting, giving them the courage to hang on while fighting against ten times their number in tanks. After the newly-prepared front line south of Soliers was occupied by unit elements rapidly thrown together, Malkomes was ordered to pull back to the main battle line. He personally covered his company against pursuing enemy tanks during its withdrawal. Malkomes was hit during this covering action and wounded by shrapnel in both eyes. In spite of his wounds, Malkomes continued to command until the situation stabilized.

With regard to the fighting of B Squadron of the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Tank Regiment of the 11th Armored Division against SS-Obersturmführer Malkomes' Panthers at Soliers and against German Panthers at Four, the English reported:

Both villages were occupied by very high quality German infantry, and the Fife and Forfars men could see the Panthers at Bourguébus through a hail of steel. Captain Hutchinson went to the east flank with two platoons to return the fire coming from Four. He ran into some Panthers there and although he was able to destroy two of them, fire from the others prevented any further movement. From Cagny through Four and from Frénouville to Soliers, tank fought against tank without any clear victor. The 23rd Hussars came to their help, but weren't able to do more than deploy. They halted directly behind the Caen - Vimont railway line, as up ahead they could see the telltale tall pillars of smoke interrupted by the round smoke rings of exploding ammunition. Ordered to advance by Brigadier Harvey, commander of the 11. Armored Division, they moved up to Soliers where the mass of the Fife and Forfars were bogged down, until they saw that there was nothing that they could do there. The Fifes had been wiped out. One of their officers ran from the area of A Squadron's burning tanks to shout that all the tanks of A Squadron had been destroyed except for four.

A British tank battalion consisted of three squadrons, each with 19 Sherman tanks. Towards 1700 hours Cromwells of the 2nd Northamptonshire Yeomanry attacked across the Caen – Vimont railway line, received tank fire some 1000 meters out of Bras and lost 16 tanks.

Presumably, these destroyed tanks must be credited to SS-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1 which had received orders around 1500 hours to occupy ready positions at Ifs and attack east on Bras and Soliers. There, it was to wheel to the north and take Grentheville along with elements of the Panther battalion, to which it would be attached. The 1. Batterie under SS-Obersturmführer Otto Holst, making up the left flank, ran into 58 tanks on its approach. Holst ordered an immediate attack. In a very brief period, the battery destroyed 10 tanks and caused a panic among the Englishmen. Five more tanks were destroyed as the fighting progressed. Although Holst was wounded at Boulon, he remained in action until the English tank unit fled to the north.

This first day of action for the Panzer regiment had brought it considerable success, and only the I. Abteilung was in combat. According to English sources, the British attackers lost 126 tanks that day. <sup>10</sup> The question remains unanswered as to why Peiper's Panzer regiment had to waste two weeks through inactivity in its assembly areas. The Panzer regiment's casualties were limited. All together, the 1., 2., and 3. Panzer-Kompanien had 6 killed. <sup>11</sup>

By evening, the Leibstandarte had taken up position in a main battle line along le-Bout-le Haut – Four – Soliers – Bras. The II. Abteilung of the Panzer regiment also moved east during the night of 18/19 July 1944. The 7. Kompanie rolled over the Orne on a railroad bridge, reached Clinchamps sur Orne, and set up in an orchard at Laize-la-Ville. Peiper called the company commanders together for an orders group. The commander of the 5. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Streipart, slid his tank over the escarpment of the railroad bridge across the Orne at Bully and was badly injured. Shortly after that happened, Peiper showed up at the tank and inquired about the crew. 12 SS-Untersturmführer Blohm took over temporary command of the company until he was relieved by SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck on 22 July. The 5. Kompanie occupied a defensive position at Verrières south of Caen. SS-Sturmmann Brunkhorst wrote, "Over the Orne as far as Caen. In the evening, still in the assembly area." 13

The tanks of the 7. Kompanie, camouflaged with tree branches, moved through Fontenay-le Marmion and at Rocquancourt turned onto the road leading to Tilly-la-Campagne. The 7. Kompanie took up a defensive position in the village of Tilly, lying to the east of National Route 158 between Caen and Falaise. SS-Untersturmführer Stiller remembered:

The individual platoons were placed in defensive positions at the edge of the village, and the vehicles were put under cover and camouflaged or brought into position according to their specific assignments. The first order of the day: camouflage perfectly, which was pretty much no problem along the hedgerows which surrounded Tilly. The second order of the day: absolute radio silence with communications by runner with enemy attack signaled by flares. The third order of the day: do not open fire, unless ordered to do so by the company. Our fields of fire were to the north. <sup>14</sup>

The tanks were dug in at Tilly during the night. Jochen Peiper commanded his regiment from the command post located on the ground floor of a small castle in Garcelles-Secqueville. <sup>15</sup> SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann had the command post of the I. Abteilung set up in a defile in a patch of woodland south of Secqueville. The command post, which had been constructed by the combat engineer squad, was continuously reinforced with the trunks of trees. <sup>16</sup> The battalion Flak platoon under SS-Oberscharführer Forstner was close by. <sup>17</sup>

The divisional command post of the 12. SS-Panzer-Division "Hitlerjugend" was also in Garcelles-Secqueville. On 19 July 1944 the "Hitlerjugend" Division assumed command of the area west of Cagny. As a result, the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was attached to the "HJ" Division. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser was sent to the regimental command post of SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche at le Hameau de Francqueville for temporary duty.

On 19 July 1944 the Panther battalion was in position behind the heights east of Bourguébus, and the assault gun battalion was in position between Bras and Hubert-Folie. In the afternoon the same three British tank divisions attacked which had received such a bloody nose from the Leibstandarte's stubborn defense the previous day. The 11th Armored Division advanced on Bras and Hubert-Folie, the Guards Tank Division on le Poirier, and the 7th Armored Division on Soliers. The III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 was attacked by tanks from two sides and some elements were taken prisoner. For hours on end, two Panthers from SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto's 4. Panzer-Kompanie held a dominant height north of la Hogue against enemy attack. 18 English tanks which struck the Leibstandarte's tanks at Bourguébus pulled back to Fours and Soliers. Tigers of the 2./Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 were in action east of Tilly at Chicheboville. The Leibstandarte was in position along the line le-Bout-du-Haut – la Hogue – Bourguébus – Troteval.

While SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser from the Headquarters Company of the I. Abteilung was looking for the regimental command post in Garcelles that day, he ran into aerial bombing which was just getting underway. Together with Peiper, he took cover under one of the staff's tanks in front of the castle. Reiser: "The bombs had just finished falling, the tanks had shook, and the window glass in the little chateau was in pieces ... Peiper said to himself: 'Either they're going to defeat us this time, or we will win the war, just like the last one." <sup>19</sup>

Peiper's telephone section leader, SS-Unterscharführer Willy Micheluzzi, remembered Garcelles:

I had a phone exchange with a ten connection switchboard in the next village. I had run a line to the command post from there, well laid in the trees. Ewald Fröhlich and I were continuously on the move through the constant artillery fire and fighter-bomber attacks which even targeted individual linemen. The line was broken once again during a conversation between Peiper and the division, and he said to me, "You poor devils are going to have to go back out!" When we later changed positions and could take up the line, we had to cut the

cable out from under the trees piece by piece. 20

In Normandy, radio communication between the command posts was generally avoided, as enemy radio intelligence using triangulation was able to determine their exact locations, whereupon they would be attacked by artillery and fighter-bombers. Communications between command posts was maintained by runners and orderly officers because, in addition to triangulation, the telephone wires were often broken by the continuous artillery fire.

During the night of 19/20 July 1944 the SPW-Bataillon moved east from St. André and Bully and took up positions in Tilly la Campagne. The 9. (gep.) Kompanie took up positions in Troteval. SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt's 9. Kompanie repelled a tank attack on 20 July 1944. Because of continuous artillery fire and fighter-bomber attacks, the company had to give up its position in Troteval. The 5. and 6. Panzer-Kompanien attacked a Canadian antitank position there in the mist caused by a rain shower, and the 5. Kompanie lost 4 killed and the 6. Kompanie 10 killed, including SS-Obersturmführer Wolfgang Häcker.<sup>21</sup>

The gunner in Panzer "544" of the 5. Kompanie, SS-Sturmmann Brunkhorst, wrote: "The first shot out of our gun was a direct hit on a personnel carrier towing an antitank gun." After almost three weeks at the front lines, this was the first day that the 5. Kompanie and the II. Abteilung were in action. That evening, the attachment of the Panther battalion to the "HJ" division was revoked.

That evening some of the frazzled and exhausted units heard of the attempted coup by a small group around Graf von Stauffenberg in Berlin and the failure of his attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler. The soldiers of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS were outraged and furious over this. At a time when the soldiers of the Wehrmacht were fighting on all fronts for the existence of Germany, and the people back home were working without rest and performing to the utmost to preserve the continuance of their nation, it surely was not the time to murder the supreme commander. The members of the conspiracy were well aware that the Allies would sign no peace agreement, as their common goal was the unconditional surrender of Germany. However, as this would deliver the Reich unconditionally and thus defenseless to the enemy powers, there was no other choice for Germany than to fight for her very survival.

On this day the English General Montgomery put a halt to Operation Goodwood.

#### Fighting South of Caen: 21 to 24 July 1944

On 21 July 1944 the Panther battalion and the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 – on the right flank of the 272. Infanterie-Division – attacked St.-Martin-de-Fontenay west of the Caen – Falaise road together. This was a joint attack with the 272. Infanterie-Division. They took the village from the southeast. That afternoon the Panthers attacked towards Caen parallel to National Route 158 and stopped south of Ifs, where they were brought to a halt by heavy tank and artillery fire. The 5. Panzer-Kompanie was at Troteval and Beauvoir. Gunner Brunkhorst was successful: "Two prime movers destroyed again today. Rich booty. Tommy attacked with

tanks. He was crushed by Wittmann. Yesterday Tommy broke through to the left of us. The 3rd Platoon ... took care of it." Wittmann's Tigers belonged to the 3./Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 and were at Ferme Beauvoir. <sup>3</sup>

On 22 July 1944 the 6. Panzer-Kompanie was fighting on Hill 72 at Beauvoir. <sup>4</sup> On 22 and 23 July the enemy laid down a barrage along the Leibstandarte's entire line in preparation for another major attack. The SPW-Bataillon staff and its 9. Kompanie was in Verrières; the other companies were still in Tilly-la-Campagne. On 24 July SS-Oberscharführer Karl Kaspari from Wittlich, the veteran leader of the 2nd Platoon of the 10. (gep.) Kompanie, was killed in action. He had the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Nahkampfspange in Silver, along with other decorations. Three days later SS-Oberscharführer Egmont Eichler, the leader of the 3rd Platoon in Preuß' 10. Kompanie, was also killed in action. <sup>5</sup> The SPW-Bataillon's adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Erhard Gührs recalled:

I took a motorcycle with a side-car through the main battle line to an outpost of Untersturmführer Walter Kern's platoon of the 9. Kompanie, which had to be temporarily pulled back because of a bombing attack. In this sector the Allies were using bombs and artillery almost exclusively to take ground. For us it was a battle of man against steel or, better yet, cat against mouse. After every bombardment, we reoccupied our positions. <sup>6</sup>

Six Tigers of the 3./Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 were hidden in ready positions in the woods at Garcelles-Secqueville south of Tilly. That evening, the enemy made an unsuccessful bomb attack on the tank companies of the Leibstandarte east of Garcelles. The 5. Kompanie lay under an artillery barrage at Verrières, and Canadian tanks felt their way forward. A tank commander from the 8. Panzer-Kompanie described how the tank crews survived the continuous enemy fighter-bomber attacks:

One day we took a hit from a small caliber weapon in the gun mechanism. The tank gun wouldn't return to position after recoil any more and the commander had to strain to push it forward with his legs. I had to take it back to the repair company with two men providing air attack warning on top of the tank. During the trip we had to constantly move from cover to cover. During one fighter-bomber attack I stopped under a tree with a gigantic crown. My two comrades ran into a nearby house, seeking cover. I wanted to take along something out of the ration box and took a little longer. While doing that I observed the fighter-bombers destroy several Panthers. Thinking that I was well hidden, I let the fighter-bombers pass overhead while sitting in the tank. However, as they flew past, one of them must have discovered my tank and fired a rocket into the tree. It detonated and suddenly the leaves were gone and my tank was very visible. The last fighter-bomber - the others had already gone - turned and came back to strafe me. I crouched forward in the driver's seat and saw the holes in the upper part of the plating race towards me like from a stamping machine. If I had not been leaning forward in the seat I would have been dead, for the back of the seat was full of holes and began to burn. I sprang out of the tank unwounded and ran to my friends in the house. The tank burned out completely.7

Allied air superiority was omnipresent. When the command

post for SS-Sturmbannführer Kling's II. Abteilung was attacked by fighter-bombers, SS-Rottenführer Albert Habbeney was able to shoot down a fighter-bomber with the battalion's quad Flak gun but the gunner, SS-Rottenführer Hermann Haller, was killed.

As the situation developed there was no possibility for Jochen Peiper to personally join the fighting in his tank. For the most part, he stayed in his command post in the château at Garcelles-Secqueville. His radio operator, SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl, described the situation:

A broad, tree-covered avenue, several kilometers long, led to the château and we dug in the commander's and adjutant's tanks under the first trees on the right and left. This was necessary because an enemy battery had taken the château under fire, and shot at everything which moved in front of it. Tank "001" had taken over continuous wave transmission, and "002" (author: adjutant's tank) voice transmission. When we had had to dash back and forth from the castle to the tanks due to radio traffic we made a sport of it, the first steps quite slow, almost at a stroll, simply ignoring the danger. Only when we heard the guns fire did we sprint the last stretch. Our signals officer chewed us out frequently for this while Peiper, grinning, tolerated it.

The shells destroyed the little château quite systematically, floor by floor. It had little effect on our command post and our quarters area. First, we were at ground level at the back and, second, we refused to let the shelling bother us. Instead we rummaged about in the upper floors. While doing so in a room which the shelling had well ventilated, I found some lace underwear in a drawer which had once probably belonged to a baroness. Our headquarters company was situated a long ways off. We couldn't get to them, and I had been unable to get fresh underwear. Without deliberation, I changed my filthy shirt for a silk blouse with lacy frills, stuck the lace decorations under my tank denims, and felt somewhat better.

Back below in the room for messengers, drivers and radio operators, I quickly forgot about my change of costume. When I was called into the command post to pick up a message which had to be transmitted, I had forgotten all about it. After I reported in smartly, the officers present became remarkably quiet. They stared at me, saying nothing until our signals officer yelled at me: "Where do you think you're going – to a costume ball?" At first, I didn't understand him but when I saw Peiper's amused smile and the now grinning faces of the other officers, I figured it out. I quickly stuffed the offending piece of lace back where it belonged.<sup>8</sup>

Peiper's orderly, SS-Oberscharführer Werner Hentschel, likewise remained at Garcelles most of the time:

The regimental command post at Garcelles was quickly recognized by the enemy as a command center. It was constantly under well-placed artillery fire which increased with every bit of message traffic. Shortly after the command post was established, an enemy artillery spotter cruised over the castle and marked it with smoke. The Allied artillery covered every movement with fire. I experienced this myself on numerous occasions when I was taken under fire while on my way from the regimental command post to the battalion command posts or other units. The only thing you could do to counter it was to step on the gas and hope you weren't hit. The telephone lines

were frequently shot to pieces. Because of that, and the fact that the commander liked to lead from the front, he frequently sought out the command posts of SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann, SS-Sturmbannführer Kling and the other units. The battlefield situation was frequently unclear and this required him to go to the units in order to maintain contact.

# The Canadian Operation "Spring" and the Fighting South of Caen: 25 July to 7 August 1944

The enemy had prepared a new deliberate attack, which was given the codename "Spring". On 25 July 1944 the II Canadian Corps attacked with the objective of capturing the ridge west of Cramesnil and the woods east of Garcelles. In a line running from May sur Orne – Verrières – Tilly-la-Campagne it was supposed to advance as far as Fontenay-le-Marmion – Rocquancourt. On the left flank of the division the 5. Panzer-Kompanie came under attack at 0400 hours and was able to initially halt the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry with its entrenched tanks until it was forced back by heavy antitank fire from Troteval. The company had three killed in action. The company commander, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, described the action:

You could hardly see your hand in front of your face in the smoke screen just before dawn. It was impossible to see over the hedges and folds of our own position. Uncertainty spread and our already overburdened nerves were placed under increasing tension. Just before sunrise the smoke screen lifted and, in spite of heavy artillery fire, the Canadians were suddenly in our positions and among our tanks. As we had no communications with our grenadiers behind us, and we could only fight the enemy infantry very poorly from our present positions, we had to protect ourselves against close-in antitank action. Because of the enemy breakthrough, the position in the brush and folds of the ground couldn't be held, so that a withdrawal was necessary ...

When the 2. Platoon and the headquarters section were attempting to pull back from the hedge, in order to move back across the gently rising terrain, they took massed fire from tanks and antitank guns, but were unable to identify the enemy positions. In a few minutes the company lost three or four tanks – mine was also destroyed – and some of the crews lost. The rest of the company was unable to hold on in Verrières, so that we had to leave the village along with the grenadiers. 1

The veteran SS-Oberscharführer Theo Jensen of the 5. Kompanie led two tanks against the Canadians during this attack and pushed back some of their elements which were trying to exploit the breakthrough. In this action Jensen's tank was destroyed. He was able to bail out, but shortly after was murdered by a Canadian officer who shot him through the back of the head. On 6 January 1945 Theo Jensen was posthumously awarded the German Cross in Gold. SS-Sturmmann Hans Brunkhorst of the same company wrote: "Early morning we pulled back. The infantry was already right in front of us. It was a huge mess. Tommy destroyed some vehicles. Who was missing? We towed away "542" with "544". It was a miracle that everything turned out alright."

The 9. (gep.) Kompanie of the SPW-Bataillon had two killed

and two missing in action at Verrières. Elements of the 1./SS-Sturmgeschntz-Abteilung 1 were also fighting there. On the division's right flank, Tilly was attacked at 0330 hours after very heavy artillery preparation, but the Panzergrenadiere of the SPW-Bataillon and the 7. Panzer-Kompanie, under SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, were able to hold it back. SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller, leader of the 1st Platoon, described the fighting with the 7. Kompanie in Tilly:

It had started to heat up already in the night before 25 July 1944. This was no longer harassing fire that was then covering our entire sector. They were softening Tilly up for the assault. The infantry crouched in their holes, the tank crews lay under their vehicles. We were plastered by artillery and mortar fire. The individual vehicles had no clear instructions in case of attack. Morning broke. We were lucky that the sun was still so low and the Canadian tanks, which were now rolling in from the northwest, had to aim into the sun. Let them get close, was the phrase of the day. The mouths of their cannons pointed dangerously at our hedgerow positions. Finally a white flare: fire at will! The tracer rounds spewed out from our hidden tank positions. Round after round left the muzzles, while more tanks tore into our hedgerows. The magic didn't last five minutes and the Canadians were stopped. When would the second wave come, which would pull the stuck enemy forces along with it? Nothing of that sort, but there was a lot of racket behind us. Heavy rocket launchers: 500 meters in front of our positions all hell broke loose. The Canadians scattered like rabbits out of the sector.4

The SPW-Bataillon lost 13 killed and 26 wounded on this day of fighting at Tilly. The 11. (gep.) Kompanie, commanded by the veteran SS-Obersturmführer Heinz "Bubi" Tomhardt, was especially hard hit. It launched immediate counterattacks to eliminate several Canadian penetrations, including one with tanks, and brought back 36 prisoners and captured two gun carriers, but it also lost four killed and 19 wounded. SS-Unterscharführer Willi Pluschke, who was attached to Tomhardt's company with his squad of combat engineers from the combat engineer platoon of the 12. (schwere gep.) Kompanie, was able to take 16 Canadians prisoner by himself during an enemy attack. After he had brought them to Tomhardt's command post, Tomhardt sent him to the battalion command post with the prisoners. When Pluschke briefed SS-Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal on the event, Diefenthal spontaneously removed the Iron cross, 1st Class from his uniform and fastened it to Pluschke's chest. A request to award the Honor Roll Clasp to this veteran frontline soldier was not approved.5

The SPW-Bataillon enjoyed excellent morale during this fighting on the Caen – Falaise road, and it continued to deny the enemy any breakthrough. <sup>6</sup> In this fighting the Panzergrenadiere had to fight dismounted, and the battalion was unable to make use of the mobility provided by its SPW.

The Leibstandarte's Panthers attacked the Canadian positions south of Verrières at 1730 hours and smashed through them until they were stopped by artillery fire and Typhoons. The 9. Panzer-Pionier-Kompanie/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, under SS-Obersturmführer Rumpf, went into action at platoon level, as was the practice on the Eastern Front. The beams

mounted on the SPW for stream crossing on the SPW were of little use as there were no attacks. The combat engineer SPW had names of birds of prey painted on the front of them.

The continuous artillery fire and the constant air attacks by bombers and fighter-bombers were also getting on the nerves of Jochen Peiper and his staff. His radio operator, Fritz Kosmehl, described an incident in Peiper's command post in Garcelles which will certainly amaze the reader:

On another occasion our driver, Otto Becker, and I rummaged through the castle and we discovered some fire extinguishers. To see whether they were still any good, we immediately grabbed two of them and had ourselves a great foam fight. Suddenly, there was Peiper in the middle of the room. We froze. However, he grabbed another fire extinguisher down off the wall, and now we really went at it. Was that our strict, and notoriously unapproachable commander? No, he wanted to let himself go for once with his men and play the fool.

In spite of heavy losses of men and materièl, the Canadians were unable to make any progress against the Leibstandarte's stubborn defense and called off Operation Spring. There was no change in the situation during the period from 26 to 30 July 1944. On 26 July SS-Sturmmann Brunkhorst of the 5. Panzer-Kompanie wrote: "Eight vehicles were destroyed (author: during the attack described on 25 July). Oberscharführer Jensen is also gone, the best platoon leader I ever knew. We're three to four kilometers behind the front with six operational tanks." 8

On 28 July the enemy attacked Rocquancourt from the direction of Verrières, where the I./SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment land the 3. Sturmgeschütz-Batterie were located. SS-Oberscharführer Otto Schaelte attacked the enemy with his assault gun and – exposed to the effect of enemy artillery and fighter-bomber attack – destroyed one tank. At that point, his assault gun received a hit which wounded Schaelte. Despite that, he continued to close with the enemy until the rest of his battery came up and joined in. A total of 15 additional enemy tanks were destroyed. Schaelte had destroyed a total of 25 enemy tanks by the time this action was completed.

SS-Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann, winner of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords, the most successful German tank commander and the commander of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101, wrote on 30 July 1944: "The war has become very hard. You can scarcely believe what our grenadiers are capable of performing despite continual lack of rest and being exposed to the severest of conditions." <sup>10</sup> Peiper regretted the loss of the Tiger Kompanie from his Panzer regiment for tactical reasons:

I believe it would have been better for the "Tigers" if we hadn't formed separate battalions and they remained organic to each Panzer regiment as a heavy company. They would have had a good home there and would have been used within the framework of the lighter vehicles in a more flexible and tactically sensible manner.

The SPW-Bataillon's armored personnel carriers were camouflaged in orchards and partially dug in. During this period the battalion received new replacement personnel. SS-Panzer Grenadier (officer candidate) Helmut Naumann who joined the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie in Tilly remembered the ration supplements:

From my meager knowledge of schoolbook French, I had

one sentence fixed in my memory: "Bon jour Madame. Avez vous quelques ouefs a vendre?" With that sentence I went to the neighboring farms every morning and properly paid for the eggs from our pay. When I returned to our tank with ten to fifteen eggs, I first fried a couple of eggs for my comrades using the blowtorch, which were thoroughly appreciated. First we dug a hole with an entrenching tool. Three stones were then set around the edge in a horseshoe shape, and the frying pan was set on them. That was our stove, and the blow torch was our source of heat."

In the meantime, SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Feldvoß had taken over his company's antitank cannon platoon. On 30 July 1944 SS-Untersturmführer Albert Möller of the 3./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was killed. 31 July and 1 August 1944 saw more attacks against Tilly, which were halted in bitter fighting. SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller described the fighting of the 7. Panzer-Kompanie at Tilly on 1 August 1944:

The situation changed suddenly shortly after 0200 hours. The harassing fire was replaced by a barrage. A wall of fire slowly crept across the railroad yard and turned the west side of Tilly into an inferno. The men in their foxholes in the northern sector of the defense were pretty much used to it, but nothing this powerful had yet been seen at Tilly. The pounding of the shells lasted for more than two hours, impact after impact, feeling its way over almost every square meter of terrain. The men in their fox holes and under the tanks almost suffocated from the smoke of the exploding light and medium caliber shells. Occasionally, the fire increased in strength. Even the tanks bounced slightly on a regular basis.

A smoke screen rolled over Tilly and, as it did, the music of the bursting shells changed considerably. The commander of "711", Untersturmführer Stiller, listened closely. Something wasn't right. He climbed through the escape hatch up into the turret, but he could hardly make out anything through the fog. Most of the shells were now coming down about 30 meters behind the tank in the middle of the village. In the fog Stiller made out men wearing flat helmets in the vicinity of the railroad crossing, already on the close side of the infantry positions. No doubt about it, the Canadians had broken through up ahead.

In a flash the crew of "711" had taken up battle stations, and the radio operator was alerting every tank. A cluster of Canadians at about company strength welled out of the fog across the railroad crossing. The men in the tanks had no idea that they were there. The man in the turret was undecided. The gunner, Sturmmann Pager, had already freed the jammed turret with a crowbar before the cluster of Canadians were visible in the fog. They were not coming alone, the man in the turret announced. But he gave no fire command. The Canadians pushed past the Town Hall at a funereal pace. They seemed to be afraid of mines and kept strictly to the village street which passed tank "711" less than 30 meters away.

Stiller's suspicions were correct. The first enemy tank was coming diagonally from the right. It was just 30 meters away when Pager smacked it on the side of the turret with an antitank round. As it started to move back, the second round landed on the upper part of the hull. The crew was driven off with machine gun fire as they bailed out. The crew had just finished with the first tank when a second moved towards it from the

railroad crossing. Eleven o'clock, 100 meters, tank. Fire at will! The tracer bored into the turret ring and that one was finished as well. A machine gun burst cleared the area around and forced the escorting infantry back over the railroad crossing. No other tanks in sight.

A glance to the rear showed the commander that the cluster of Canadians was coming back; it eventually broke into full flight. The destruction of the two escorting tanks, and the lack of following infantry, didn't seem to be a part of the Canadians' itinerary. Now the next thing was to open fire on the entire formation so that it would be sent scattering into the city hall. The crew waited until the bulk of the troops were between 10 and 12 o'clock. High-explosive rounds and a burst of machine gun fire — as well as a little assistance from a machine pistol from the turret — caused the enemy to pull out quickly and abandon its wounded and dead.

Obersturmführer Wolff had wanted to take his tank into the Town Hall courtyard but – because his turret had jammed – he wasn't able to get it pointed in the direction he wanted to shoot. Just then the second enemy tank crossed the railroad crossing and turned its turret towards him. Pager's shot from "711" didn't come a second too soon. Aiming with his entire tank, "701" (author: Wolff) finished off the motionless enemy on the railroad crossing. His ammunition blew up and a real wall of fire swept the crossing area clear of Canadians. When Wolff saw that elements of the withdrawing Canadians were trying to hold on to the railbed, he pushed forward with his jammed turret, so that these brave men also hurried back to their original positions. 12

For the courageous defense of the 7. Kompanie in Tilly, the company commander, SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, was recommended by Peiper for inclusion in the Honor Roll of the German Army:

Wolff's company was located in an extremely critical portion of the main lines and defended at Tilly against a continuously attacking enemy who benefited from unheard of materiel superiority. The lines on both sides of the village Tilly jumped to the rear and enabled, as a result, flanking fires against the enemy positions. The continuously repeated day and night attacks of the enemy emphasized daily the meaning of this extraordinarily important position. If the enemy succeeded in occupying this village, it would immediately cause the withdrawal of the entire line within the sector of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps "LSSAH".

The continuous artillery fire and the numerous attacks of enemy fighter-bombers and close-support aircraft caused the concern that this important position could be destroyed. It was here that SS-Obersturmführer Wolff organized a defensive framework on which all of the enemy's heavy attacks with massive materiel superiority shattered.

On 21 July 1944 strong Canadian infantry forces (in regimental strength) attacked Tilly, supported by 10 enemy tanks. They rolled up the friendly main lines and moved against the completely destroyed village which had already been under the heaviest enemy artillery barrage imaginable for three hours. After breaking the resistance of friendly infantry, which had to move back under the pressure of the vastly superior enemy, the enemy succeeded in breaking into the village with infantry and armor forces.

SS-Obersturmführer Wolff had his deeply dug-in tanks remain in position and orchestrated the defensive fire at decisive sectors against the vastly superior enemy. At the same time, other enemy forces, bypassing the village from the southeast, attacked Wolff's company in its unsecured rear and threatened to destroy the integrity of the defense. Without deliberation, Wolff moved out of position in his command tank, repulsed the omnipresent advancing enemy in hard fighting in the village and among the houses and, as a result, stabilized the friendly defensive sector. In the process, nine enemy tanks (Shermans) were destroyed.

The enemy succeeded in creating another penetration after breaking through friendly front lines on 31 July 1944, again in the rear of the company. Once again, SS-Obersturmführer Wolff was able to eliminate the enemy infantry which had broken through by leading a daring counterattack in his own tank and without any type of support in a fight which lasted one and one half hours in the village of Tilly. Of the five attacking enemy tanks (Shermans), he was able to destroy two.

Three further attacks of the enemy were likewise repulsed and destroyed through the bold actions of SS-Obersturmführer Wolff. Without significant friendly losses, SS-Obersturmführer Wolff tallied the following successes in his engagements: 13 enemy tanks, 2 gun carriers, two armored personnel carriers, two prime movers, and two antitank guns destroyed; one gun carrier captured; and, 30 prisoners taken. The losses of the enemy in dead and wounded were approximately 200 men. These successes, as well as the fact that the entire defensive sector of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division "LSSAH" stood or fell with the possession of the village of Tilly, were exclusively due to the personal service rendered by this outstanding soldier.

Due to the influence of the continuous night and day artillery fire, such élan and steadfastness on the part of Wolff's company can only be attributed to its rock solid and exemplary company commander. SS-Obersturmführer Wolff was wounded for the fifth time while fighting in Normandy. SS-Obersturmführer Wolff is worthy of being listed in the Honor Roll of the German Army.

In his tank crew in Tilly were gunner Heinrich Kahlen, loader Peter Mnhlbach and driver Rolf Ehrhardt. SS-Sturmmann Kahlen remembered his commander:

Wolff embodied the attributes of idealistic youth. He was hard on himself, but also towards others. He put up with no opposition but, on the other hand, he was sometimes a big kid. His respect towards superiors sometimes left something to be desired, which didn't bother him in the least. He was fearless, considered things carefully, and once in a while listened to his gunner. He was ambitious with regard to his fellow officers, but always acted properly. 13

It may perhaps be surprising that this aggressive commander read classical literature when things were quiet. His favorite poet was Friedrich Hölderin and the pocket edition of his works was his constant companion. He was particularly fond of the final lines from the poem "Tod fürs Vaterland" (Death for the Fatherland"):

The battle is ours! Live on, Oh Fatherland, And don't count the dead! Not a single one too many has fallen for you, Dear Fatherland! 14

As a man, Wolff seemed to be very reserved, almost forbidding. He thought through a lot of things entirely by himself and didn't talk much about them. <sup>15</sup> Werner Wolff wasn't the only follower of classical German literature in the 7. Kompanie. SS-Sturmmann Harald Pager, gunner in tank "711", constantly had his pocket-sized classics next to the gunner's hatch. Pager was transferred to the Leibstandarte after completing fighter-pilot training and was supposed to be sent back to the Luftwaffe. After the war he became famous as an expert on Africa.

Peiper's description of SS-Oberscharführer Hans Siptrott in action that day is a good example of how the tank crews of the 7. Kompanie fought in Tilly:

After six hours of heavy bombardment, the Canadians launched an attack in battalion strength against Tilly-la-Campagne under the cover of a thick smoke screen. Siptrott and his fighting vehicle were in an important position at the focal point of the defense. His tank had been hit by artillery several times. One track was shot off and the cannon and the turret machine gun were inoperable. Despite that, Siptrott stayed in his fighting vehicle. The enemy infantry recognized that the tank was immobile and defenseless, surrounded it and attempted to destroy it with close-in weapons. Siptrott defended his tank with hand grenades, submachine gun and pistol in fierce fighting and held out until he was relieved by a counterattack by the company. By his courageous behavior Siptrott prevented the enemy from exploiting its penetration and made an outstanding contribution to the company's defensive success.<sup>16</sup>

The operations of the 7. Kompanie in Tilly correspond in general to the operations fought by Peiper's Panzer regiment. It took no part in major offensive operations in Normandy, except for the attack by the Panther battalion on 18 July 1944. After that there were only local, limited counterattacks. Normally the tankers spent their days on the defensive. Well camouflaged, often half dug in, they waited for the Canadians and the English to attack. Then they destroyed the attacking enemy tanks from their hidden positions and separated them from their infantry. In this way they were able to stop most attacks. The amount of artillery used against the tanks was unimaginable. Above and beyond that the Allied air forces were also constantly present. Wolff's platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Stiller, wrote:

At a minimum, most of the actions in the bocage country took on the character of defensive fighting or delaying tactics, so the company never fought as a unified fighting formation. This required the company commander to view tank tactics at two or more levels. Most of the actions fought by the 7. Kompanie in Normandy were as infantry support in defensive positions, essentially ambush positions at the platoon level, mostly even as tank sections, Wolff's orders were mostly of a mission-type nature. He had hardly any influence on the course of the battle at Tilly. But even the most experienced tank man could hardly have done any better. Flares and runners had to be used to transmit orders and requests for guidance, since any radio traffic in the entrenched ambush positions for the practically immobile tanks would have meant they would have been knocked out. Any tank which had been triangulated was helpless against the

resulting concentrated artillery fire. In any case, Wolff handled the situation in Tilly correctly. In my opinion he couldn't have done anything else; his relative inexperience with tank tactics was immaterial. His strong self-confidence allowed him to present himself as the master of the situation. Never at any time did I detect in him the slightest weakness in command. <sup>17</sup>

The Canadian Army historian Stacey wrote: "The 1. SS-Panzer-Division had continued to present evidence of its uncompromising courage." <sup>18</sup> The 8. Panzer-Kompanie under SS-Obersturmführer Sepp Armberger was located northwest of St. Aignan. On 1 August 1944 the SPW-Bataillon moved from Tilly to Rocquancourt and May sur Orne. One company went into position on blood-soaked Hill 112. The 5. Panzer-Kompanie was also located in Rocquancourt on 2 August. <sup>19</sup> The SPW-Bataillon adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Gührs, reported:

We were totally concealed in this village, a small town with a high tower, and the companies were in position on the edge of the village. They had orders not to fire and not let themselves be provoked by anything into firing. The observer for the rocketlauncher battalion was in the church tower. This continued for a period of three days. It fooled the Canadians facing us into believing that the village was clear of the enemy. As a result, they marched in broad daylight without any security towards the village we were holding. When they were near enough, the rockets cut off their retreat, and all we had to do was collect them. The boys were terribly afraid, not only because they had fallen right into the hands of the SS, but also because they had certainly heard many fables of our cruelty from their propaganda. Our field kitchen had just arrived with coffee and we were happy to give them some. We then turned them over to the regimental staff.20

In this type of situation Peiper's command tank "001" was hardly ever in combat. His crew consisted of the signals officer SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn in the gunner's seat, the continuous wave radio operator SS-Unterscharführer Horst Schumann, the voice radio operator SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl and the driver SS-Oberscharführer Otto Becker. <sup>21</sup> Peiper's tank and that of the adjutant remained dug-in on the castle grounds at Garcelles. During a conference at the regimental command post in the basement of the castle, the building came under massive artillery fire once again. Shrapnel penetrated suddenly through a window in the cellar and wounded Peiper on the back of his left thigh, which damaged the sciatic nerve. An army officer in attendance was severely wounded in the head. <sup>22</sup>

On 2 August 1944 Peiper fell ill with non-infectious jaundice caused by a gall bladder infection and had to leave his regiment. He was moved to the corps hospital at Sées and then to a hospital in Germany. Starting on 6 August he was in the Reserve Hospital at Lake Tegern. <sup>23</sup> As a result, SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann had to take over command of the Panzer regiment and SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke took over the Panther battalion on 5 August 1944.

After the withdrawal of the SPW-Bataillon and the 7. Kompanie, the 6./SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 1 and other units fought at Tilly. On the German side, the battle for Tilly will forever be connected with the name of Erich Göstl. This obscure 19 year-old machine gunner from Vienna embodied the fighting spirit of the Leibstandarte's soldiers against the Allied

invaders. Because of that the author will discuss SS-Panzergrenadier Erich Göstl.

The German positions stretching across the road leading to Bourguébus and the railroad line running just west of Tilly had been under artillery fire for hours. Erich Göstl had taken up an ambush position with his machine gun in front of the German main lines which ran along the north edge of Tilly. The 6. Kompanie had only 4 operational machine guns left. The company command post was located in the cellar of a ruined house, about 130 meters distant from Göstl's machine gun position. There was a tall grain field in front of the lines between the railway and the road which offered cover to the attackers.

The 5th of August 1944 was a day like any other in the fierce fighting in Normandy. A barrage rained down on the pile of ruins that was Tilly. The men let the hurricane of fire rain down on them in stoical calm; it had long since ceased to mean much to them. During the early hours of the afternoon the first enemy units crept undetected through the protecting grain field and along the road ditches up to the lines of the 6. Kompanie. Göstl saw them first and opened fire with his machine gun from a range of 30 meters. His precise shooting quickly stopped the enemy advance with heavy losses. But the halt was only temporary, and his assistant gunner was soon hit.

Göstl was then on his own. The enemy had detected him and placed Göstl's machine gun under aimed fire. Suddenly, he was badly hit; the shot shattered his left eye. Now began what Erich Göstl later described as "only doing my duty." <sup>24</sup> He stayed behind his gun and fired belt after belt into the ranks of the attackers. The loud staccato of his MG-42 roared out and his bursts tore into the enemy. Grimacing with pain, the young Viennese lay behind his weapon and fired and fired again. Once more he came under well-aimed fire. Shrapnel wounded him on the upper left arm, but he didn't even glance at the wound.

Then, suddenly, he took another hard blow to the face which almost tore his head off. His right eye had been hit, and he was now completely without sight. Although he could hear the sound of the exploding shells and the rattle of the machine guns, blood was running down his face and he could see nothing. However, Göstl felt around for his machine gun and continued to fire by sound in the direction from which the enemy was charging towards him and the company. He was suffering horrible pain, but he suppressed it. "I couldn't do anything else at the time", he later said. <sup>25</sup>

Erich Göstl continued to hold out behind his machine gun. He received another hit in his right cheek and nose in his torn-up face. Wounded and with a jam in his machine gun, Göstl's machine gun was silenced. His friend Elmar Bonn worked his way forward to him and with the help of some other men was able to bring him back under fire. <sup>26</sup>

Göstl's resistance prevented a penetration of the German lines and the loss of Tilly. The 19-year old Erich Göstl, a SS-Panzergrenadier from Vienna, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 31 October 1944. At that time he was studying law in Prague. He had lost both eyes in Tilly. <sup>27</sup> This was doubtless the hardest thing that could happen to a soldier. However, the young Viennese continued to go his way unperturbed. After the Americans had imprisoned the blind man in a camp for an entire year, he continued his studies and finished with a degree as a

Doctor of Law.

On 5 August 1944 the 6. Panzer-Kompanie was fighting east of Tilly. <sup>28</sup> On 4 August SS-Sturmmann Hans Brunkhorst of the 5. Panzer-Kompanie in Rocquancourt noted in his diary:

We are at a quarry. Whenever a barrage lands, everything is covered with dust clouds. We have camouflaged our tank with corrugated iron. It looks more or less like an old heap of scrap metal. 5 August 1944: Tommy attacked this evening and was thrown back twice. This time it was the rocket launchers. At 2330 hours we pulled back. We were moving into the area of St. Lô. According to rumors, five Panzer divisions were going to attack there. 29

On 6 August 1944 SS-Untersturmführer Alois Brandmaier of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was wounded. Shortly thereafter, he wrote a comrade from hospital:

Yeah, a piece of iron has grazed me too. After I got a pair of hand grenade fragments in my hide at the beginning of August, a piece of shrapnel shattered my left wrist on 6 August. Although I had already given up the hand as lost, I was able to keep it with me, and so now I'm back in Germany. A sizable piece of shrapnel broke the ulna in two places, split the radius and tore away a piece of the wrist bone. Fortunately, the fingers aren't paralyzed, but the wrist will probably be stiff. However, that's not so bad. I'll still be able to play tank platoon leader with it.<sup>30</sup>

# SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Operation "Lüttich" (without Peiper): 7 to 9 August 1944 The Falaise Pocket and the Retreat Across France: Through the End of August 1944.

The Americans succeeded in taking St. Lô on the west flank of the German Front in Normandy on 19 July 1944. After that, they then broke through the German front to the south at Avranches. The 7. Armee, commanded by SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, planned an immediate counterthrust running from east to west towards Avranches. It would cut off the enemy forces advancing to the south from their rearward supply lines. This attack was to be carried out by the XXXXVII. Panzer-Korps with the 2. SS-Panzer-Division "Das Reich", the 17. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Götz von Berlichingen", the 1. SS-Panzer-Division LSSAH, the 2. Panzer-Division and the 116. Panzer-Division.

The relief in place and transfer of the Leibstandarte to the west during the night of 4/5 August 1944 was carried out with difficulty because of the troop requirements of other commands and prevented the complete division from arriving by the date required, 7 August 1944. The Leibstandarte, subordinated to the 2. Panzer-Division, was to make an attack on St. Bathélemy, north of Mortain, and then on to the west. On 7 August only the Panther battalion, the 5., 6. and 8. Panzer-Kompanien and SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 of the LAH had made it into their ready positions and were attached to the 2. Panzer-Division. SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann had about 60 tanks available. 1

For the first time, the Leibstandarte would encounter American troops. Operation "Lüttich" began at 0200 hours on

the morning of 7 August 1944. SS-Sturmbannführer Knittel's SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 took le Mesnil-Tôve and pushed towards Mesnil-Adelée. The Panther battalion moved out of the la Tournière area, with the 1. Kompanie in the lead. It moved through St. Clément to St. Bathélemy, but was then blocked temporarily on its approach by a burning bomber which had crashed on the route of its advance.

Still in the lead, the 1. Kompanie attacked but was stopped by heavy defensive fire. SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke gave the order to "stay on the enemy" and turned south, together with his adjutant. In heavy fog both Panthers attacked Bathélemy driving north along a defile. The Battalion Adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, commanded the first tank and just behind him came the Battalion Commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Werner Poetschke. Soon after moving, Fischer's tank was hit in the front hull and lost its left drive sprocket. In spite of the hit from the antitank gun, Fischer returned several shots and was able to eliminate the American antitank gun. At that point Poetschke moved forward. Fischer rode back to the command post on the prime mover of the American antitank gun and grabbed the command tank of the orderly officer. After he advanced as far as the commander in the new Panther, the fog lifted and he was knocked out again, this time by a fighter-bomber. Fischer was wounded by shell splinters.2

SS-Untersturmführer Hans Müller of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie was killed. The Panthers pushed past St. Bathélemy to the south as far as the heights of le Bourlopin. Then the skies opened and fighter-bombers and Typhoon fighters dove savagely onto the German tanks. With repeated low-level attacks which lasted for hours, they brought the Panzer regiment's attack to a standstill. At St. Bathélemy the 1. Kompanie lost four killed and SS-Obersturmführer Otto's 4. Panzer-Kompanie had five killed in action.<sup>3</sup> The veteran commander of the 2. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Malkomes, was wounded for the fifth time. 4 The 5. and 6. Kompanien were fighting north of Mortain. The 5. Kompanie fought at l'Abbaye Blanche, while Sepp Armberger's 8. Kompanie was in action northwest of Mortain at le Neufbourg. These three companies lost five killed. 5 Kuhlmann had led the Panzer regiment's attack, not Peiper as has been stated incorrectly in print on several occasions.6

Elements of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 were fighting for St. Bathélemy. Two "Grillen" of the 13. (IG)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 participated in this attack north of Mortain. SS-Sturmmann Hermann Staritz in one of the "Grillen" reported: "We came through this fighter-bomber attack all right. It had lasted for hours. New fighter-bombers kept coming back and you could see them fire with two puffs of smoke and then the two rockets were on their way. They even fired them from high altitude, since they were under Flak fire."

Right after the attacks, Stariz' Platoon Leader, SS-Oberscharführer Hans Reck, tried to get his Grille over a railroad embankment. It was hit by an American antitank gun. Both he and another man from his Grille were killed. The Adjutant of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Obersturmführer Erhard Gührs, described the fighter-bomber attacks: It seemed to me that there were about 200 aircraft. Each one could have taken

out one of our vehicles. We rapidly abandoned the vehicles to take cover in the ditches beside the road and, gritting our teeth, we had to watch our column being torn to pieces. It was a terrible mess." 9

The commander of the 10. (gep.) Kompanie of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß added:

Of course, there was the fighter-bomber that had been shot down and which crashed into a tank putting it out of action, but most of the other tanks and SPW fell prey to this extremely intensive, hours long, low-level air attack. Those grenadiers — at least those who were still capable of fighting — had taken cover to the right and left in the hedge-covered terrain. They were quite happy that the fighter-bombers swarming around us like bees had found more rewarding targets than a simple man. I thought so too. I heard that Peiper was supposed to have had a heart attack, Diefenthal lost his hearing from a bomb explosion close to him and Kuhlmann was unable to get the attack moving again. My brave runner, Sturmmann Horst Reinecken, was also killed while he was bringing the news to the Army Panzer unit commanding us, that their commander and adjutant had been killed not far from my hedge. 10

The SPW-Bataillon took St. Bathélemy from the Americans in hard fighting. The 9. Kompanie pushed forward west of St. Bathélemy as far as la Fresne Poret. The staff and the 9., 10. and 11. Kompanien had seven killed and two missing. <sup>11</sup> Along with physical exhaustion, mental fatigue began to increase among the officers, noncommissioned officers and men of the SPW-Battalion. On 7 August the combat strength of the battalion had dropped to 48 men. SS-Obersturmführer Gührs:

Our battalion command post was in a hole in the ground, the Americans were in front of us and we were under uninterrupted bombardment all day long. In the evening we received orders from the regiment to attack. SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt and I looked at each other questioningly. Then we took a direct hit on our foxhole. What was left of him was hanging on my tunic. I had lost consciousness and soon noticed that blood was pouring out of my left upper arm and into my face. I tied up the arm with a piece of webbing and then lost consciousness again. While runners were looking for the battalion command post, I was taken back to the main aid station by a tank moving back. The tent was full of wounded, who all lay together on a heap of straw waiting for their operations. When I entered the surgeon suggested that I might want to take my watch from my wrist, as my arm was going to be amputated ... 12

After being wounded for the seventh time, SS-Obersturmführer Erhard Gührs never returned to the battalion.<sup>13</sup> Mortain, further to the south, was taken by the 2. SS-Panzer-Division "Das Reich." "Das Reich" was unable to make contact with the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 located south of St. Bathélemy, however. On 8 August 1944 the Leibstandarte attacked again and the Panzer regiment got to Bellefontaine.<sup>14</sup> Juvigny was also taken by the Panthers. The 5. Panzer-Kompanie attacked north of Mortain and had two killed in action. During the day the Americans launched a counterattack, but it was beaten back at St. Bathélemy. The 9. and 10. Kompanien of the SPW-Bataillon lost 11 killed and 2 missing there. <sup>15</sup> SS-Junker Karl Zumpe described the attack of

the 6. Kompanie:

Just before the operation, we had taken a break in a small clearing. As commander of a section, I was ordered to take the point. The radio of Untersturmführer Domes, our platoon leader, was not working. I was still lying in the grass with my crew when we were given the mission. While discussing it, the driver, radio operator and loader seemed very pessimistic. The gunner, who was the only one of the crew originally from our unit, tried to raise the spirits of the other three, who were former Luftwaffe men. The attack was at 0630 hours 2.5 kilometers northwest of Mortain, three kilometers south-southwest of St. Bathélemy. We drove our tank "637" into a defile and the other vehicles in the company followed.

Because of my experience, I had the turret hatch slightly open. A precaution, which previous fighting had taught me. If the tank were to burn, we would probably be unable to open the hatches. Here on the Western Front it was possible to leave the hatches unsecured. In the east it would have been far too dangerous, as Russians often jumped up on the tanks and dropped hand grenades inside. As the road lying in front of us was lined with trees and shrubs, and completely covered at the end, I opened my advance with machine gun fire. I had also learned that an enemy under cover would react to this and give away his position. And that's what happened here as well. In a fraction of a second, I saw two flashes of light coming towards me. Then there was an enormous jolt, and the tank was in flames. As my comrades told me afterwards, I shot out of the turret like a rocket, tearing out the throat mike cable as I went. As I slid down from the exterior like lightning, I saw blood running down my leg, but my camouflage uniform had no large holes in it. 16

On this same day SS-Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann, the most successful tank commander of the war, was killed in action further east at Gaumesnil, east of the Caen - Falaise road. In the space of 14 days in January of 1944 he had been awarded both the Knight's Cross and the Oak Leaves as Commander of the "Tiger" Kompanie in Peiper's Panzer regiment. In his first action on the invasion front on 13 June 1944 at Villers-Bocage he attacked the 7th British Armored Division entirely by himself and destroyed 21 tanks. He was a SS-Obersturmführer and commander of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 at that point. For this action he was awarded the Swords to the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross on 22 June 1944. Effective 10 July 1944 he commanded the corps' Tiger battalion. He found his death as a tank soldier when his Tiger exploded as a result of a direct hit at noon on 8 August 1944 in a Norman field. Peiper, who had greatly valued Wittmann as a soldier and as a man, wrote shortly afterwards: "... that SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 of the Leibstandarte will follow his example in combat and will never forget him." The death of Michael Wittmann, who had destroyed 138 tanks and 132 antitank guns, moved Peiper deeply: "With ... Michael we have lost a great soldier who was suddenly called away from us by unavoidable Providence after a meteoric rise to the zenith of his reputation." 17

On 9 August 1944 the Leibstandarte sent in reinforcements to plug the gaps in the front and repelled an American attack on St. Bathélemy. Battalion commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke, described his courageous commander of the 4.

Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto: "When the enemy threatened to make a breakthrough on 9 August 1944 Otto initially led the defense from his tank. As the fighting progressed, he accompanied the infantry, weapon in hand, in order to make an unconditional defense possible. Otto was wounded in that fighting."

The operational tanks of the 6. Kompanie were also fighting at St. Bathélemy. <sup>18</sup> The orderly officer, SS-Untersturmführer Georg Adam, was killed. In spite of all this courage, the attack against Avranches had bogged down and could not be brought back into motion. SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Krämer put the blame for the failure of the attack on Jochen Peiper's absence, along with other things. The attack of the Kuhlmann-led Panzer regiment had gotten itself lost several times, which cost valuable time. "If Peiper had been there, that wouldn't have happened", stated the I. SS-Panzer-Korps Chief of Staff. <sup>19</sup>

During the next few days the few remaining operational tanks of the Leibstandarte fought against the advancing Americans. On 13 August 1944 there were 14 Panthers and 7 Panzer IV's in combat. On 13 August 1944 enemy tank forces occupied the village of le Menil-Angot after a surprising advance on the Carrouges – Rânes road and so cut German forces in the area of le Champ and Joué du Bois off from their withdrawal route to the north. The enemy was attempting to extend his blocking position to the east and west by bringing in more tanks from the area of le Menil-Angot and St. Martin.

The commander of the 8./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Obersturmführer Sepp Armberger, launched a reconnaissance in force with five Panzer-IV's and two armored cars against this threat. His tank group was attacked on the south edge of le Menil-Angot by tanks, antitank guns and eight fighterbombers and lost two tanks. Armberger brought his tanks immediately under cover at the crossroads south of le Menil-Angot and went out on a foot reconnaissance with his headquarters section leader and a few men of his crew. Under difficult conditions - the enemy was aware of the presence of the German group – Armberger and his men worked their way forward to the positions in front of the village, in order to destroy the enemy tanks in close combat. That would then allow him to move his tanks against the village. By his clever and courageous behavior Sepp Armberger was able to destroy four tanks with the Panzerfaust.

The enemy forces immediately pulled back into the village and were no longer able to block the road to the south with their weapons or prevent the Germans from withdrawing their troops during the night. For this act the Viennese Armberger was awarded the Knight's Cross on 31 October 1944. However, he was never able to wear the decoration, as he was killed in action by artillery fire on 21 August 1944 during the breakout from the Falaise Pocket when he left his tank to conduct ground reconnaissance. <sup>20</sup>

Likewise, SS-Unterscharführer Hans Hillig, from the Panzer regiment's signals platoon, destroyed two US tanks in a wood at Carrouges in close combat with a Panzerfaust. The signals officer, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn, destroyed another tank with a Panzerfaust. Both men received the Tank Destruction Badge, and Hillig received the Iron Cross, 1st Class on 16 September 1944. <sup>21</sup>

The issuance of orders became ever more difficult for the

battalion commanders due to the increasingly unclear enemy situation, a situation which was unclear, even to them. SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller recalled his experiences as a platoon leader:

When I had to take command of the rest of the 5. Kompanie on the night of 11/12 August, Wolff ordered me to do the following shortly thereafter: "Move back on roads still clear of the enemy; conduct a delaying action starting at Domfront and move through la Ferté-Macé to reach Carrouges." It was to be assumed that, at least by this time, no clear picture of the situation was available to the commanders. It was only through my own eyes while in my blocking position east of St. Georgesd'Annebecq that I could see that we had been outflanked in the east. It was only on the evening of 18 August that I received the order from Kling at the battalion command post to hold the position in Forêt de Calvaire. (I had to go to the command post on foot in the darkness after being picked up by a runner. The command post was in a group of farm buildings at St. André-de-Briouze.) The order contained neither the enemy situation or our own. After holding the position, I was to move back in the direction of Putanges at midnight, use the only intact bridge over the Orne there and reach the battalion in the area around Habloville.

The helplessness and lack of situational awareness affected many of the commanders, e.g., the 7. Kompanie which still had a lot of combat power was not ordered immediately into the area of Carrouges where its 17 tanks could have accomplished a lot if they had been employed by Wolff with groups of infantry and other units. Instead, the 7. Kompanie, coming from Bretteville-sur-Laize on 8 August, reached the Forêt d'Andaine and halted there until the evening. It then received marching orders for Ger. It wasn't stopped until Barenton where it had to retrace it steps, losing several vehicles through differential problems in the process.

They couldn't be towed for long stretches, because the clutches of the tow tanks wore out after a while. As a result, only 13 or 14 tanks reached the area of Joué-du-Bois after a delay of two days. The employment of Wolff – two days earlier – would not have prevented the closing of the pocket at Falaise, but it would have kept a few roads to the northeast open for two nights. In any event, the important road hub at Rânes would not have fallen into American hands so quickly. But those are only assumptions.

Our salvation – being able to be the "last guys" over the bridge at Putanges – was the fact that the US Army in all likelihood had its operational dividing lines with the British along the N24 Flers – Argentan and did not cross that line in strength at Fromentel.

SS-Obersturmführer Wolff was severely wounded in the leg on 18 August 1944.

In the course of the fighting the Leibstandarte got into the Falaise Pocket. On 20 August 1944 the disarrayed Kampfgruppen of the division launched a breakout from the pocket to the east. During this action the divisional commander, SS-Brigadeführer and Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Theodor Wisch, was badly wounded, and his men were barely able to get him out of the pocket in an SPW. SS-Sturmmann Alois Pumberger of the 8. Panzer-Kompanie described his memories of the breakout from the Falaise Pocket:

St. Lambert. My last tank commander was Oberscharführer Weber. We stood across from the notorious orchard. There was a road between it and us. We were in partial cover in a depression, and there were a number of infantrymen behind our tank. Uninterrupted artillery shelling. Dead and wounded lay around in masses, without help. We were to break out of the pocket from the inside. It was very hot and the temperature inside the tank was unbearable. There were two Panthers right beside us. Sturmbannführer Kling spoke to Weber.

Then suddenly, both Panthers were in motion. They rolled forward and tried to cross the road. The Panthers were destroyed by an antitank gun within a very short time. The next Panzer IV was ours, I can still hear Sturmbannführer Kling saying to Weber: "Weber, move out!" At first, Weber didn't react and then pointed at the destroyed Panthers. Then Sturmbannführer Kling came forward to me and said: "Driver, move out, into the orchard!" My heart started racing and I thought that my time was up. I started up and, as there was a slight slope, I put it into third gear, redlined the engine, and then let the clutch out. The tank leaped forward. Then I heard another shot. Under cover of the dust we rolled into the orchard, where I was forced to run over several dead men.

Shortly thereafter the tank was hit by several artillery rounds and was unable to move. The crew bailed out and scattered. Toward evening the continuous shelling stopped. Slowly, a number of men from every possible unit assembled. Sturmbannführer Kling wanted to sneak us out of the pocket. There were several hundred wounded packed together in many sheds and shelters. Great numbers of dead and wounded lay all around. Nobody could do anything for them. It was a horrifying mess. I went to sleep somewhere in a shelter and thus loss contact with Kling's group. Towards morning I took off by myself, always moving parallel to the hedgerows. A great number of burning German vehicles along the way. Whenever I looked over the hedges I could see the GI's, almost close enough to touch. I thought to myself that I was going in the wrong direction. But suddenly someone called to me in German and I was happy to have escaped that chaos, even if by accident.

The commander of the Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment, SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann, was in his command Panther when it was destroyed. His crew consisted of signals officer and gunner SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Pönisch, continuous wave radio operator SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl, voice radio operator SS-Unterscharführer Horst Schumann and driver SS-Oberscharführer Otto Becker. The last three belonged to Peiper's tank crew. Kosmehl reported:

I was quite unaccustomed to the Panther, although I rapidly became used to the different storage arrangement of the shells. I kept in continuous radio contact with the battalions, until contact was lost with the II. Abteilung led by Kling after I had heard that it had broken through. At that point we also moved out. Relieved, I turned around in my seat to light a cigarette. Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann suddenly ordered: "Grab smoke rounds!" But before I could move a finger, there was a frightful crack and everything went black around me. When I recovered there was smoke around me and I was alone. The rest of the crew must have thought that I was dead. My hatch was jammed. I tried in vain to open it. It was good that I always

kept a heavy hammer close to me. Two blows were enough and I was able to get out. As I pulled myself up onto the platform, I saw the rest of the crew running away, already a long way from the tank. They were running across a terribly open area. Otto Becker turned around once and saw me, ran back and helped me off. 22

The crew climbed into the communications SPW of SS-Unterscharführer Hans Hillig from the signals platoon, which was behind them. It immediately took off:

I immediately said to myself, now it's our turn. Suddenly Kuhlmann cried: "Turn to the right!" He had discovered a house. "Stop" The officers got out to orient themselves in the house. Then we were fired on and a shell just missed us. "Get out!" I yelled. There was a depression to the left. "Get a move on" I said. I was the last one to jump off. Not a second too soon. I hadn't really quite hit the dirt when our SPW blew up.<sup>23</sup>

Kosmehl was wounded in the face and Kuhlmann had received a back full of shrapnel. <sup>24</sup> Afterwards, Kosmehl was in a hospital for a long time. Shortly before Christmas, SS-Untersturmführer Köchlin brought him his promotion to Oberscharführer and the Iron Cross, 1st Class. Shortly afterward one eye was removed and an operation carried out on the other. However, he lost that eye later as well. <sup>25</sup>

Kuhlmann never returned to the Panzer regiment. SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke took over command of the regiment. The commander of the II. Abteilung, SS-Sturmbannführer Heinz Kling, was severely wounded on 21 August 1944 and SS-Hauptsturmführer Nüske took over his battalion. <sup>26</sup> The commander of the 8. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Sepp Armberger, was killed at Mossey.

Chantilly, some 15 kilometers north of Paris, had already been assigned as the assembly point for the regiment, even before the breakout. On 17 August 1944 SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke had already ordered SS-Untersturmführer Reiser to leave the pocket to go to Chantilly in a Schwimmwagen. <sup>27</sup>

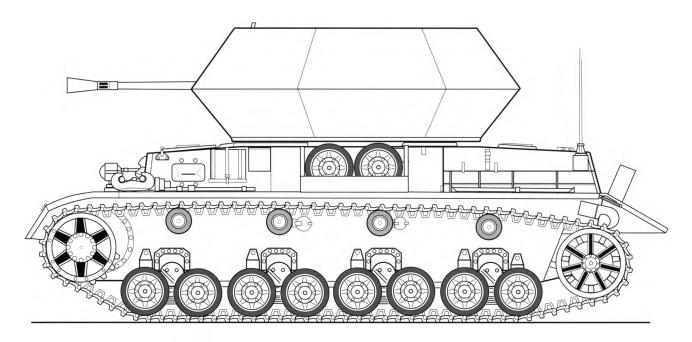
The division was badly chewed up during its escape from the pocket, where almost all its equipment and weapons were destroyed. Still, some units were lucky. For example, the cannon platoon of the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie got out intact with all six of its SPW. During the breakout the wounded battalion commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Otto Dinse, was discovered at the last minute and taken along. 28 Along with Dinse, the SPW-Bataillon also had the following losses in wounded: SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt, commander of the 11. Kompanie, which he had taken over from the commander of the supply company, SS-Hauptsturmführer Siegfried Wandt; the adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Erhard Gührs; SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern, a platoon leader of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie; SS-Untersturmführer Alois Brandmaier; and, SS-Untersturmführer Bernd von Bergmann. The following were killed in action: Commander of the 9. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt; SS-Untersturmführer Albert Baur; SS-Untersturmführer Fritz Böcker; as well as noncommissioned officers serving as platoon leaders.

After crossing the Seine at Elbeuf and Rouen, the division's shattered Kampfgruppen, closely pursued by the advancing Americans and their ever-present air force, marched back to the east across northern France until they reached Belgium. A few vehicles of the Panzer regiment's II. Abteilung were loaded on a train in Cambrai. Elements of the regiment stopped briefly in Hasselt and Genk, and then from there marched to the borders of the Reich. <sup>29</sup> SS-Obersturmbannführer Franz Steineck, commander of SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 1, commanded the division until 30 August 1944 when SS-Standartenführer Wilhelm Mohnke took over the division. <sup>30</sup>

Kampfgruppe Diefenthal was formed at Charleroi in Belgium on 1 September 1944 and consisted of the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, a platoon of the 9. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and elements of the I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, as well as the Woelky Unit (7.5 cm infantry guns - also called the experimental company). It was led by the commander of the SPW-Bataillon with SS-Untersturmführer Wolfgang Lüdecke as adjutant. This Kampfgruppe was in action at Avesnes and Namur and then at the West Wall from Bitburg to Aachen and Würselen. The cannon platoon of the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie, under SS-Unterscharführer Emil Knappe, destroyed seven US tanks on 2 September 1944. Since Normandy, it had grown to 12 cannon SPW. 31 Shortly after that action, SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Feldvoß described it:

In the night of 1/2 September 1944 we occupied the village of Avesnes in order to interdict enemy armored spearheads and destroy them. When the tanks which had been expected showed up in the morning twilight, they encountered heavy resistance. We knocked out seven tanks with our platoon. The enemy pressure grew too heavy, however, and the danger arose that we would be encircled. We withdrew at that point. In the process the vehicle led by Fritz Wrede was knocked out. Fritz bailed out, together with his crew. They went between the houses to get under cover. We were just barely able to recover the vehicle and get it running. In the meantime, Fritz and his men had worked their way back through the village to the east, where they linked up with other comrades from the company. The Americans, however, were able to attack our withdrawal movement and scatter the company. The bulk of it, however, was able to fight its way back.

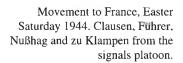
On 3 September 1944 the veteran leader of the combat engineer platoon of the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie, SS-Hauptscharführer Fritz Haferstroh, was killed at Binche. <sup>32</sup> Other Kampfgruppen of the division were in action at Aachen and at Nimwegen in Holland. <sup>33</sup>



"Ostwind" Flakpanzer IV/3.7cm Flak
Courtesy of George Bradford



From the right: SS-Rottenführer Otto Beutel and Fritz Thier of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 loading up on the train in April 1944.







Easter Sunday 1944 at the railroad station at Hildesheim during a short halt in the movement of the Panzer Regiment's Headquarters Company to Flanders. Starting second from the left in the back: Fromm, Otto Becker, Knight's Cross winner Bobby Woll (schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101), Fantner and Schneider. Lower left: Günter Gaul.



Five centimeter antitank gun of the 10. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 on the train.



May 1944 in Flanders: SPW drivers' training for the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 at Opitter. On the right: The long-time veteran SS-Rottenführer Jupp Willinger and Paul Zwigart.



Jochen Peiper (middle) greets the newly arrived recruits for the Panzer Regiment in Hasselt (Belgium) in May 1944.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl inspects the 9. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Left: SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt, the company commander.





Peiper at the arrival of the new tankers. With him are his orderly, SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Köchlin (left), and his adjutant, SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Nüske.



On the staff of the Panzer Regiment (left to right): SS-Unterscharführer Hans Hillig (signals platoon), SS-Untersturmführer Erich Münkemer, (reconnaissance platoon), SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Köchlin (orderly) and SS-Oberscharführer Otto Becker (Peiper's tank driver).



Köchlin and Peiper.



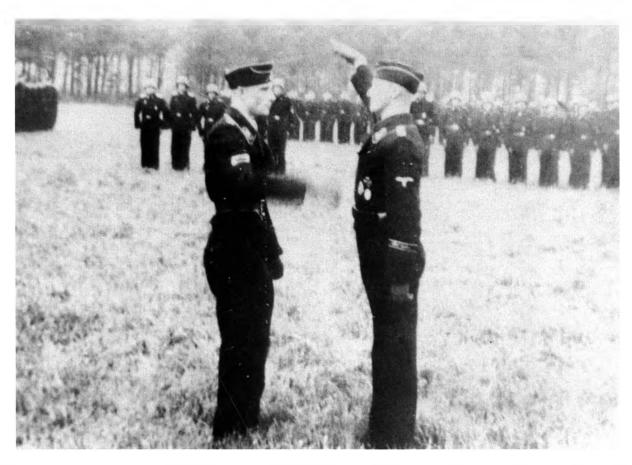
Peiper and Nüske.



Peiper, Nüske and Köchlin.



On May 14 1944 the I. (Panther) Abteilung assembled at Houthalen for the presentation of decorations earned during its most recent operation on the Eastern Front. Music provided a worthy setting for the ceremonies.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke (right), commander of the I. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, reports his battalion to Peiper.



Jochen Peiper, SS-Hauptscharführer Heinz Knappich of the 2. Kompanie (in the middle) and SS-Unterscharführer Valentin Bersin, of the 3. Kompanie (second from the right).



SS-Hauptsturmführer Gruhle (adjutant, I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1), SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Nüske (regimental adjutant) and Peiper.





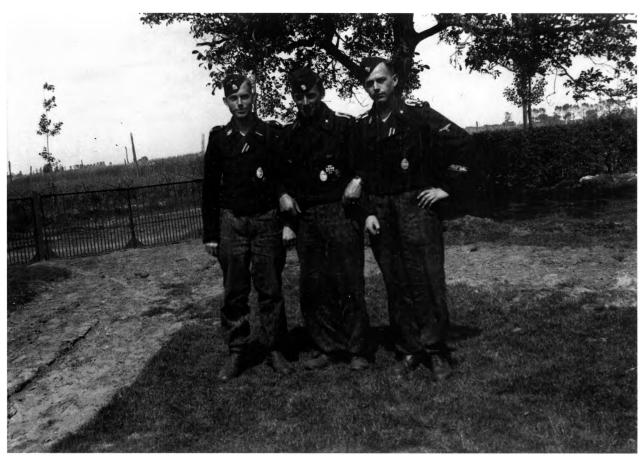
Peiper with the I. Abteilung. From the left: SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto (company commander, 4. Kompanie), SS-Untersturmführer Hans Hennecke and SS-Untersturmführer Hermann Kahl.



Peiper decorates the men of his regiment. Here he awards the War Service Cross, 2nd Class to SS-Standartenoberjunker Erwin Nau (maintenance officer), SS-Hauptscharführer Karl Gallinat (first sergeant of the Headquarters Company) and SS-Oberscharführer Albert Still.



Men of the regimental signals platoon of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. On the left: Radio station section leader, SS-Unterscharführer Hans Hillig, who destroyed two American tanks in close combat on 13 August 1944. In 1946 he was condemned to death in the Malmedy Process.



Peiper's tank crew: SS-Sturmmann Horst Schumann (continuous wave radio operator), SS-Unterscharführer Otto Becker (driver), SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl (voice radio operator).



Tank radio operators of the 5. Kompanie in April 1944. Second from left: Karl-Heinz Meusel (killed in action: 16 July 1944).



SS-Hauptscharführer Heinz Mohrmann of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (killed in action on 8 August 1944 north of Mortain) and his crew (from the left): Ludwig (loader), Friedrich Thien (driver) Mohrmann, Alfred Jansen (gunner) and Pack (radio operator).



SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt decorates Panzergrenadiere of his 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 at Opitter May 1944.



Jochen Peiper at Hasselt.







On 4 June 1944 the commander of the III. (gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl (middle), commander of SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1, Gustav Knittel, and the commander of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, Hans Dauser, were awarded the Knight's Cross. SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Theodor Wisch made the presentation of the awards.



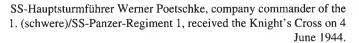
SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl, commander of the SPW-Battalion, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 4 June 1944.



Guhl with the regimental commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Sandig.



In May 1944 a number of SS-Oberjunker from the 11th War Reserve Officer Course returned to the SPW-Bataillon from the SS-Panzergrenadier school at Kienschlag. Among them was Fritz Bücker, here as an SS-Standartenjunker.



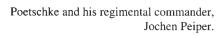




The divisional commander, SS-Brigadeführer Wisch, presents Werner Poetschke the Knight's Cross he was awarded on 4 June 1944.



Peiper, the divisional adjutant Fritz Beutler, Poetschke and Wisch.







Peiper in conversation with the divisional commander Wisch. Poetschke on the right.



After the presentation of the Knight's Cross to Poetschke, the divisional commander invited some of his officers to coffee and cake. From the left: SS-Obersturmführer Hans Gruhle, SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal, Werner Poetschke, SS-Brigadeführer Theodor Wisch, Jochen Peiper and, next to him, SS-Sturmbannführer Fritz Beutler.



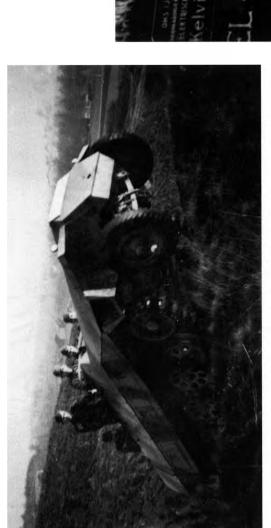
Poeschke, Wisch, Peiper, Beutler, Gruhle and Diefenthal.



On 5 June 1944 SS-Sturmbannführer Rudi Sandig, commander of the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, awarded the Nahkampfspange in Silver to SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl and Fritz Bremer, commander of the 4. (MG)/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, and other men of the regiment. In order to provide a suitable framework for the presentations at a stadium at Bree, military music was provided.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, company commander of the 1. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



Drivers' training for new SPW drivers of the 11./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



Two veteran SPW drivers of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie were awarded with the Iron Cross, 1st Class: SS-Rottenführer Paul Zwigart, (left) and Fritz Karg (right) In the middle is SS-Unterscharführer Kurt Heißner, missing in action since October 1944.



Officers of the SPW-Bataillon: SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt and SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl.



Bree, May 1944, noncommissioned officers of the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2: SS-Hauptscharführer Haferstroh (right front), SS-Unterscharführer Pfalzer, Feldvoß (hidden) and Motzheim.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Guhl with his daughter, May 1944, at Bree.



Veteran officers of the SPW-Bataillon receive the Nahkampfspange in Silver for surviving 30 or more days of confirmed close combat. In this picture Sandig presents SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie the Nahkampfspange in Silver.

Next to him is Georg Preuß, to the right is SS-Sturmbannführer Sandig.



From the left: SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Babick, SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt, unknown, Erhard Gührs and Chief Surgeon Dr. Gustav Haarmann.



Unknown, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs and Chief Surgeon Dr. Gustav Haarmann, who received the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.



From the left: SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs and Chief Surgeon Dr. Gustav Haarmann, who received the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.



From the right: Chief Surgeon Dr. Gustav Haarmann, Gührs, Tomhardt, Babick, Preuß and Schmidt.



 $Two\ friends:\ SS-Untersturm f\"uhrer\ Erhard\ G\"uhrs\ and\ SS-Obersturm f\"uhrer\ Hans\ Schmidt.\ Preuß\ stands\ behind\ them.$ 



Officers of the SPW-Bataillon who were decorated with the Nahkampfspange in Silver (from the left): SS-Obersturmführer Hans Schmidt (commander of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie), SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt (platoon leader in the 13. (gep.) Company, SS-Untersturnführer Heinrich Meyburg (Signals Officer), SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Babick (commander of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie), SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl (battalion commander), SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß (commander 12. (gep.) Kompanie), SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs (adjutant).



From the left: Chief Surgeon Dr. Haarmann, SS-Obersturmführer Babick, SS-Untersturmführer Gührs, SS-Obersturmführer Tomhardt, SS-Untersturmführer Meyburg, SS-Obersturmführer Preuß (Knight's Cross 1945) and Hans Schmidt.



Men of the reconnaissance platoon cleaning a barrel.



SS-Untersturmführer Erich Münkemer, leader of the reconnaissance platoon of the Headquarters Company of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (left), and SS-Unterscharführer Günther Gaul, tank commander.



Peiper's orderly, SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Köchlin (left), and his driver Ritschel.

Sport were part of training. Here the soccer team of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 at Genk on 7 May 1944 before a game with the 6. Kompanie which it won 9 to 4. From the left: Volkert, Klemp, Pflughaupt, Jensen, Thürmer, Lotze, Frieb, Kronenberg, Hänze, Funken and Kotschi.

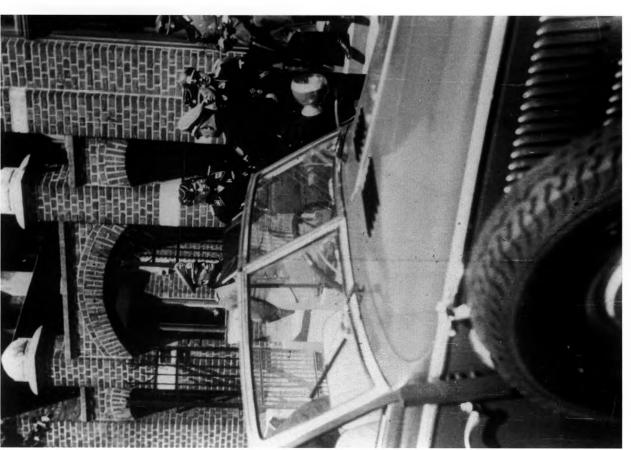




The city of Hasselt, where the regimental staff of the Panzer regiment was located, was frequently attacked by English bombers which caused heavy damage to the city and killed Belgian civilians.

Quad Flak of the II. Abteilung during training. Hans Brückner (left), temporarily assigned from the Luftwaffe, led the platoon in Normandy.





In May 1944 the Inspector of the Armored Forces, Generaloberst Guderian, visited the SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 of the Leibstandarte at Genk. Guderian (left) in conversation with SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS Sepp Dietrich. Peiper (middle) and SS-Hauptsturmführer Kling (right).



Nüske, Peiper, Kuhlmann, Kling and Dietrich.



Peiper in the car, together with Guderian (left) and Dietrich.



Officers of the II. Abteilung of SS-Panzer Regiment 1. From the right: Knight's Cross winner Kurt Sametreiter and Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff. Behind them: Streipart and B. Junker.



SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck and SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke (right).



SS-Hauptscharführer Rudi Knobloch, platoon leader in the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was awarded the Nahkampfspange in Gold and the German Cross in Gold.



Noncommissioned officers of the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 at Bree. From the left: SS-Oberscharführer Hans Fuchs, SS-Hauptscharführer Wilhelm Haferstroh (combat engineer platoon) and the SS-Unterscharführer Walter Malek, Emil Knappe, Roog, Springman, Paul Pfalzer, Edi Funk, Schneider, Toni Motzheim, Helmut Feldvoß and Willi Pluschke.



 $The \ regimental \ signals \ officer, SS-Obersturm f\"uhrer \ Helmut \ Jahn \ (left), \ in \ an \ Schwimmwagen \ with \ his \ driver \ Clausen.$ 



Hans Siptrott and Werner Höh, tank commanders in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



The commander of the I. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Sturmbannführer Kuhlmann, and the commander of the 3. Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Sachse (right).



Hans-Herbert Meuser, Headquarters Company of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment  $1. \,$ 



Peiper, second from left, at a commanders' briefing. In front: General der Panzertruppe Walter Krüger.



Awards presentation for the Headquarters Company of the Panzer Regiment.



The Flak platoon leader of the Headquarters Company of the Panzer Regiment, SS-Hauptscharführer Heinz Schröder, with SS-Obersturmführer Rudi Mäule. In the rear: SS-Oberscharführer Köhnen.

After the invasion started on 6 June 1944 the Panzer regiment moved to the Schelde Estuary. A Panzer IV of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 at Knesselare.





The leader of the terrain reconnaissance platoon of the Panzer regiment, SS-Oberscharführer Karl Köhnen (right) and the Spieß of the Headquarters Company, SS-Hauptscharführer Karl Gallinat.



Peiper welcomes the new men who have arrived from the SS-Panzer-Ersatz-Regiment. Right: SS-Untersturmführer Köchlin.



The commander of the Headquarters Company, SS-Obersturmführer Rudi Mäule (left), with the motorocycle reconnaissance platoon leader, SS-Oberscharführer Karl Köhnen, who was missing in action in Normandy. Below: SS-Oberscharführer Duchow.



Peiper welcomes replacements at Hasselt.



Peiper's command tank with his driver Otto Becker and his voice radio operator Fritz Kosmehl (right).



Horst Schumann and Wilhelm Nußhag of the signals platoon of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



The commanders of the 5. and 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Streipart (right) and Benoni Junker.



Men of the signals platoon of the Panzer regiment at Hasselt. From the left: Ludwig Rockelmann, Rudi Führer, unknown, Fritz zu Klampen, Otto Becker, Fritz Kosmehl, unknown and unknown.



Peiper and Albert Frey, Oak Leaves winner and commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 of the LAH.





SS-Hauptscharführer Konrad Heubeck, platoon leader in the 1. (schwere) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 4 June 1944. He was presented the Knight's Cross on 17 April 1945 as a SS-Untersturmführer.



On 1 June 1944 SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, commander of the 2. (schwere)/SS-Panzer Regiment 1, was awarded the German Cross in Gold.



The commander of the 5./SS-Panzer Regiment 1, SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Streipart, decorates deserving tankers in his company.



Streipart during the awards ceremony, SS-Unterscharführer Paul Klemp (left) and Hermann Schumann.



SS-Sturmann Fritz zu Klampen of the signals platoon of the Panzer regiment.

## Reorganization of the Division Within Germany: September to November 1944

After crossing the German border in September 1944 the division set up a reporting center in Siegburg. The I. Abteilung of the Panzer regiment was in Dellbrück, Holweide and Brück near Cologne; the II. Abteilung was in villages around Geber, Birk, Bergisch Gladbach, Breidt-Deesen, and Pohlhausen; and, the regimental staff was in Bensberg. On 16 September 1944 16 Iron Cross, 1st Class and 93 Iron Cross, 2nd Class were awarded in the Panzer regiment.

In the Headquarters Company the Iron Cross, 1st Class was received by SS-Unterscharführer Karl Raquet and Hans Hillig of the Signals Platoon; in the 1. Kompanie by SS-Unterscharführer Adolf Thomas; in the staff of the I. Abteilung by Obersturmführer Karl Kremser, the battalion maintenance officer; SS-Obersturmführer Horst Gülden, orderly officer in the II. Abteilung; SS-Untersturmführer Alfred Müllenbach and SS-Unterscharführer Hans Jarosch of the staff of the II. Abteilung; tank commanders SS-Oberscharführer Richard Koch (5. Kompanie), SS-Unterscharführer Willi Geschonnek and Walter Wrabetz (6. Kompanie) and Heinz Schrader (7. Kompanie); the platoon leader of the 7. Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller; the first sergeant of the 6. Kompanie, SS-Hauptscharführer Michael Meschnarz; and, from the 9. (Eng.) Kompanie, SS-Sturmmann Hans Geise, SS-Rottenführer Willibald Zangl and SS-Unterscharführer Paul Lenk.1

The regimental commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, was recommended for promotion to SS-Sturmbannführer by the divisional commander SS-Standartenführer Mohnke on 30 August 1944:

Poetschke has a strong personality of open, upright character. A strong will, paired with great devotion to duty and an extraordinary maturity, marks his conduct and in general makes him a man to be emulated. Calm and collected, and yet bold and daring before the enemy, he has proven himself in many operations and displays extraordinary prudence and unconditional stability in the leadership of the men entrusted to him. Given command of a battalion in advance of his contemporaries, he has mastered all missions and also proved in action on the Invasion front that he has good decision-making capability and possesses sufficient knowledge to lead and employ his battalion in a tactically correct fashion.<sup>2</sup>

The SPW-Bataillon was located at Heidelberg, the staff in Dossenheim and the 12. (gep.) Kompanie in Schwabenheimerhof. In the SPW-Bataillon on 16 September 1944 the Iron Cross, 1st Class was awarded to SS-Rottenführer Wilhelm Demianiuk and SS-Hauptscharführer Leonhard Fischer of the staff; to SS-Unterscharführer Erich Ueckert, Karl Menne, Eduard Maron, and Walter Schäfer and to SS-Rottenführer Horst Buttkow and Egon Nesper of the 10. (gep.) Kompanie; to SS-Unterscharführer Walter Müller and Alfred Schmidtke of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Günter Ludwig of the combat engineer platoon of the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie; the Commander of the supply company, SS-Untersturmführer Wolfgang Lüdecke; and, the orderly officer SS-Untersturmführer Walter Kern. In addition 52 Iron Cross, 2nd Class were awarded.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of September the division was to be moved into new assembly areas. The Panzer regiment, still commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke, sent out SS-Untersturmführer Herbert Junker as the quartering officer for the regiment and SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser for the I. Abteilung to Rahden. Shortly after sending the advance party the regiment began the move. When it was over the I. Abteilung was located in Oppendorf, Oppenwehe, and Wehdem, the II. Abteilung in and around Oppenwehe and the regimental staff in Rahden. The entire division was divided among the villages around Lübbecke in eastern Westphalia. The SPW-Bataillon was at Engter, the 9. (gep.) Kompanie in Bramsche, the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie in Rulle. SS-Sturmbannführer Siegfried Wandt commanded the battalion, as Diefenthal was still in action with his Kampfgruppe.

Jochen Peiper was still at Lake Tegern, where he was slowly recovering from acute complications from jaundice at the Bayernhof Hotel which had been converted to a reserve hospital. His wife and three children, Elke, Hinrich and Silke, often came to visit him from nearby Rottach-Egern. Among the men of the Leibstandarte in the hospital there, Peiper met several from his units. That's how he recognized the 20-year-old SS-Untersturmführer Luis Brandmaier, who was there as an ambulatory patient, although he had only been a platoon leader in the SPW-Bataillon on the invasion front, and before that had fought in Peiper's battalion as a Sturmmann until 1943. He visited Peiper several times there. As Peiper's illness wasn't contagious, he was given leave to return home to his family for a few days. During this period he paid a visit to the nearby SS Officer Candidate School at Bad Tölz.

Peiper anxiously followed the reports from the front. His thoughts were constantly in France with his men who were fighting hard there. The steadily advancing Soviet armies stood in front of East Prussia on the eastern borders of Germany. The Americans advancing from the west, were still halted right at the West Wall. German cities lay under a hail of English and American bombs. Equipment and fuel production was suffering irreplaceable losses. The German Reich was in a very tenuous position.

But Peiper was a soldier. He knew his duty; and he continued to take it seriously. The Allied war aims, the unconditional surrender of Germany, meant that Germany would lose all rights and be defenseless. On 7 October 1944 Peiper was released from the hospital at Lake Tegern and was given convalescent leave. Even the doctor treating him thought he was on leave, although he had already gone back to his regiment during this period and arrived in Rahden on 13 October 1944.

Peiper gave command of the II. Abteilung to the former commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Guhl, to replace the wounded SS-Sturmbannführer Kling. The first tanks arrived in October and intensive combat and field training was immediately begun for the new men. <sup>5</sup> The training status for some of the newly-arriving personnel had to be regarded as catastrophic, as there were tank crewmen among them who had not yet been inside a tank, let alone driven one or fired a round from one.

When it became apparent that the regiment would no longer receive enough tanks to recover full combat strength before the approaching operation, Peiper had the staff, Headquarters Company and the 1. and 2. Kompanien of the I. (Panther) Abteilung moved from Oppendorf to Wietzendorf at the beginning of October. The 6. and 7. Kompanien of the II. (Panzer IV) Abteilung were also moved to Wietzendorf, a part of the training area at Munster. Together with the few tanks that were previously already available to the regiment, all tanks were then provided exclusively to the 1. and 2. (Panther) Kompanien and to the 6. and 7. (Panzer IV) Kompanien, which were then constituted as the so-called I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. SS-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke, formerly commander of the Panther battalion, took over command of this new battalion.

On 13 October 1944 a tank retrieval detail under SS-Untersturmführer Hennecke was sent to Grafenwöhr. There was already a detail from the Fallschirm-Panzer-Regiment of the "Hermann Göring" Division waiting for tanks there. However, as the Leibstandarte was higher on the priority list than this unit, Hennecke's men were able to get the Panthers and take them to Soltau by rail. From there they were taken to the companies in Wietzendorf.<sup>7</sup>

Only half of the authorized number of tanks had arrived by the end of October 1944. As a result Peiper had only 32 Panzer IV's instead of 96 and only 24 Panthers instead of 73, with no command tanks among them. 8 The crews of the 3. And 4. (Panther) and 5. and 8. (Panzer IV) Kompanien were then consolidated into the II. Abteilung. Each battalion set up a training company. Starting 2 November 1944 the Panther battalion's training company was commanded by SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, who had been badly wounded in the leg in France. 9

This meant that in the fifth year of the war even the Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment, the absolute elite of Germany, could no longer be completely equipped with the number of tanks it was supposed to have. This fact speaks against the frequently alleged supposed preference given to equipping the SS divisions. It should also be mentioned in passing that the "Hermann Göring" Division's Fallschirm-Panzer-Regiment in 1944 consisted of three fully equipped battalions and that its Flak regiment possessed 4 battalions with a total of 24 batteries.<sup>10</sup>

At the Leibstandarte the regimental Flak platoon, under SS-Hauptscharführer Paul Schröder, moved to Ohrdruf and was trained there along with personnel transferred from the Flak battalion on the new quad 2 cm Flak Panzer IV "Wirbelwind" and the 3.7 cm single Flak Panzer IV "Ostwind". Eight Flak tanks were received in Ohrdruf and formed the basis for the new armored Flak company. Two platoons were formed with two "Wirbelwind" and two "Ostwind" Flak vehicles each. These were commanded by Schröder and by SS-Oberscharführer Hechler who had transferred from the Flak battalion. The Flak platoon from the Headquarters Company of the II. Abteilung, which consisted of three quad Flak mounted on half tracks, was transferred to the company as its 3rd Platoon. The Flak platoon of the I. Abteilung was dissolved.

At the end of the training period the company was incorporated into the Panzer regiment in Rahden as the 10. (Flak) Kompanie, and SS-Obersturmführer Karl-Heinz Vögler from the Flak battalion took command. <sup>12</sup> Flak vehicle commander SS-Unterscharführer Karl Wortmann remembered their recep-

tion in Rahden:

After detraining we had to assemble in formation at the railroad station, with the crew in front of each vehicle. Then Peiper, his adjutant Gruhle, and Sturmbannführer Poetschke appeared. Vögler reported in to Peiper, who gave us a short welcoming speech. The officers trooped the line. Every gun commander had to report to Peiper and give his name. He took a great interest in us. He mostly asked where we came from and what we had done previously. My driver, Erich Michen, said that he had previously worked on an estate as a tractor driver. Peiper laughed at that, and told him that then he would make a good tank driver. 13

The 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, which continued to be commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Erich Rumpf, was in Kleinendorf. It had SPW only for its first two platoons, but these had been provided with neither crossing beams nor any other bridging equipment. The other platoons were equipped with trucks.

Jochen Peiper transferred his tank's continuous wave radio operator, SS-Unterscharführer Horst Schumann, out for officer training. "When I was transferred to the preparatory course I was allowed to select a book from his very modest library, and I was interested in something historical. So I picked Herr Heinrich by Fritz Vater – which was about Heinrich I – and Peiper gave it a personal dedication." <sup>14</sup>

The commander of the 2. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, who had particularly distinguished himself in Normandy at the attack on Soliers on 18 July 1944, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 31 October 1944. On the same day the Knight's Cross was posthumously awarded to the commander of the 8. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Sepp Armberger, who was killed in action on 21 August 1944 at Mossey.

On 9 November 1944 the entire Panzer regiment assembled for a ceremony on a large field in Rahden. Young boys from the Hitlerjugend and the Jungvolk also attended. Jochen Peiper addressed his men from a small podium draped with the black SS-banner with a Panther, which had been driven onto the field, in the background. He referred to the regiment's forthcoming duties at this serious stage in the war and appealed to their personal commitment. Then Peiper awarded decorations for the fighting in Normandy.

In the 5. Kompanie the Iron Cross, 1st Class was awarded to tank commander SS-Unterscharführer Erich Nagel, who had lost both legs to a fighter-bomber attack in Normandy and who was still in hospital, gunner SS-Rottenführer Rudolf Ullrich and driver Fritz Thien. In the 8. Kompanie, tank commanders and SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Winter, Roman Salcher and Josef von Janikowski received the award. Also awarded were the commander of the Repair Company, SS-Obersturmführer Wilhelm Ratschko and the surgeon of the II. Abteilung, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Rudi Neumayer. 15 In addition, 72 Iron Cross, 2nd Class and other decorations were awarded.

On 9 November 1944 the Leibstandarte received for presentation the first of the rare Panzerkampfabzeichen with numbers of days in action. The commander of the I. Abteilung, SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke, his adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, the commander of the 3.

Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Gerd Jahn, and the commander of the 4. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto, received one with the number 25. A number of noncommissioned officers and men had fulfilled the requirements for the 2nd level of the Panzerkampfabzeichen and, among others, it was awarded to SS-Sturmmann Edmund Martin of the 3.Kompanie, SS-Rottenführer Hans Schumann of the 5. Kompanie, SS-Rottenführer Otto Fischer of the 6. Kompanie and Peiper's radio operator, SS-Unterscharführer Horst Schumann. Many men who had earned the award did not receive it. 16

Although Poetschke had fulfilled the requirements for the Panzerkampfabzeichen with 50 days in action, only the badge for 25 days could be awarded him, as there were no others available. 17 As a curiosity in the Panzer regiment, Werner Poetschke received the Nahkampfspange in Bronze on 15 November 1944. The commanders of the I and II. Abteilungen, Poetschke and Guhl were promoted to Sturmbannführer on 9 November The frequently wounded SS-Obersturmführer Ernst Otto was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer. Under his command the 4. Kompanie had destroyed 108 tanks and 73 guns on both the Eastern and Western Fronts. 18 Because of his many wounds, he was given command of the supply company of the I. Abteilung.<sup>19</sup> Konrad Heubeck of the 1. Kompanie, who had been awarded the German Cross in Gold, was given a battlefield promotion to SS-Untersturmführer for bravery. The commander of the training company for the I. Abteilung, Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, remembered: "On 9 November Peiper pinned the wound badge in gold on my chest. Do you know what he said then? He said: 'Wolff, the next step after this is a cross of wood.' But I wasn't too keen on getting that..." 20

On 20 October 1944 SS-Oberscharführer Hans Siptrott of the 7. Kompanie was recommended for the German Cross in Gold and on 2 November 1944 Peiper recommended SS-Oberscharführer Theo Jensen, who was killed in Normandy on 25 July 1944, for mention in the German Army's Roll of Honor. Peiper also recommended SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff for the honor.<sup>21</sup>

There was a close, exclusive circle of comradeship in the Leibstandarte which had been forged in the previous operations and which withstood every strain. The letter from Peiper's signals officer, SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn, to the parents of a missing Sturmmann from his platoon (Fritz zu Klampen) may serve as an indicator of the pronounced and especially strong bonds between officers and men in the Waffen-SS:

The day before yesterday, through my old unit, I received the happy news that your son Fritz has given his first sign of life in English captivity. I was extremely pleased to hear this. You cannot imagine how worried we have been for Fritz. He had become very close to all of us. And I am certainly justified in saying that in my platoon, he was one of the best. He was always in a good humor, brave in action, never forgot how to laugh, and was an enthusiastic SS man. <sup>22</sup>

After the fighting in Normandy, the mood of the regiment was no longer as optimistic as it had been earlier. The men knew that the situation was serious on every front, but were determined to go give their all for Germany. The enemy pow-

ers had often clearly said what would be in store for their homeland if they didn't decide this fight in their favor. In some parts of East Prussia, which the Red Army had already occupied, the Soviet troops had already shown their true face to the world by their bestial behavior and the murder of the civilian population. Day by day and night by night the Americans and the English transformed Germany's cities into ashes and brought death to countless thousands of women and children, workers and other defenseless civilians. Under the physical difficulties brought by the fifth year of the war, the training in the Panzer regiment of the Leibstandarte continued along with all of its difficult psychological stress. Jochen Peiper wrote:

Once again we were sent replacements and tanks. The quality and quantity were appropriate for the times. Despite all that, training continued in a persevering manner and the upcoming operations prepared with professionalism. Please don't ask, however, how that was accomplished. The cannon rounds were simulated with the coaxial machine gun and the Panzer IV's pulled into position by teams of soldiers.

The signals officers of the regiment and the I. Abteilung changed. SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn was detached and SS-Untersturmführer Horst Krause took over the duties of the regimental signals officer. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Buchheim had already arrived in Cologne-Holweide as signals officer for the I. Abteilung. SS-Obersturmführer Karl Kremser continued to lead the 1. Kompanie and on 9 November 1944 SS-Obersturmführer Friedrich Christ took over the 2. Kompanie from Hans Malkomes. SS-Obersturmführer Benoni Junker continued in command of the 6. Kompanie, while SS-Hauptsturmführer Oskar Klingelhöfer took over the 7. Kompanie for SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff who was not yet entirely fit for duty.

SS-Obersturmführer Gerd Jahn commanded the 3. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Martin Denker the 4. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Stiller the 5. Kompanie and SS-Obersturmführer Hans Rattenhuber the 8. Kompanie in the tankless battalion of SS-Sturmbannführer Guhl. SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wettach had the Headquarters Company.

Jochen Peiper resumed his beloved handball games, in which he himself took part. He pushed everyone hard in their duties and he set up tank exercises for the officers, including those in the trains. The governmental and political leadership in the area of east Westphalia was proud to have the Leibstandarte in its region and hosted the divisional commander, SS-Standartenführer Wilhelm Mohnke, and his staff officers several times during this period. As a result Mohnke was guest of the district leadership in Oldenburg on the occasion of a reading given by the actor Heinrich George in the Oldenburg State Theater. He was also invited to Berlin by the Reich Youth Leadership of the Hitlerjugend and visited Oberstleutnant Nowotny's (Düsen) Jagdgeschwader 77 (Jet Fighter Squadron 77) in the vicinity of Lübbecke. Shortly thereafter, diamond's winner Nowotny was Mohnke's guest in Lübbecke. <sup>23</sup>

Jochen Peiper wanted a change in divisional command and discussed this several times confidentially with the divisional adjutant, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Meier, and other officers. When it became known that Reichsführer SS Heinrich

Himmler would be in the vicinity of the division at the beginning of November Peiper decided to take advantage of this opportunity to intervene with Himmler for the appointment of a new divisional commander. <sup>24</sup>

Himmler arrived in his special train in the vicinity of Lübbecke on 4 November 1944 and met with Mohnke. For some reason Peiper was unable to present his case to the Reichsführer. Himmler promoted Mohnke to SS-Oberführer on this occasion. <sup>25</sup> The next conflict with Mohnke took place only a few days later, when Peiper discovered in a letter from SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller, that Mohnke wanted to detach Stiller for duties as Adolf Hitler's adjutant in the Führer Headquarters. Peiper prevented this, reporting in to Mohnke and making it very clear that he needed his company commander more than the Führer Headquarters did.

SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller remembered Peiper's predilection in seeing his young officers sail into the harbor of matrimony. Peiper had even offered the assistance of his wife to a few of them when she was present in Flanders before the invasion: "When I reported back to him in Rahden in November 1944 his first question was to ask if I had found a wife. I was only able to talk my way out of it by answering that it was very difficult to speak properly to any woman with upper and lower jaws wired together." <sup>26</sup>

At the SPW-Bataillon on 27 October 1944, Nahkampfspangen in Silver were awarded and Nahkampfspangen in Gold were recommended for a few veteran noncommissioned officers. Because the administrative requirements for the award of the Nahkampfspange in Gold were unclear in the Leibstandarte, the Leibstandarte initially only submitted names for the award, even though the battalion was allowed to approve it, if not present it. The presentation itself was only to be made by Adolf Hitler. SS-Hauptsturmführer Otto Dinse, the commander of the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie who was wounded in Normandy, had already been awarded the Nahkampfspange in Gold. Because of his confirmed 56 days in close combat, SS-Unterscharführer Werner Kindler of the cannon platoon of the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie was put in for the Nahkampfspange in Gold.

On 27 October 1944, among others from Kindler's company, SS-Unterscharführer Toni Motzheim and Willi Pluschke and SS-Rottenführer Günter Ludwig and Georg Irmler received the Nahkampfspange in Silver. <sup>27</sup> The battalion commander's SPW driver, SS-Unterscharführer Paul Zwigart, also received the Nahkampfspange in Silver. <sup>28</sup> SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Knobloch of the 10. (gep.) Kompanie had already been awarded the Nahkampfspange in Gold in July and, as a result, had been transferred to the Supply Company. <sup>29</sup> In the other companies of the SPW-Bataillon, a few Nahkampfspangen in Silver were also awarded. They were a visible distinction for frontline soldiers who had proven their worth over an extended period.

Drivers were sent to Spandau to bring back new SPW. After his return from the front in command of a Kampfgruppe named after him, SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal took over command of the SPW-Bataillon once again. On 29 October 1944 he was awarded the German Cross in Gold. He also wore the Nahkampfspange in Silver and the Silver Wound Badge. 30 The SPW-Bataillon was equipped with new armored

personnel carriers before the end of October.

The 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie, commanded by SS-Hauptscharführer Jochen Thiele, received three cannon platoons with six SPW each. The platoon leaders were SS-Oberscharführer Paul Pfalzer and Helmut Feldvoß and SS-Unterscharführer Werner Kindler. <sup>31</sup> The 9., 10., and 11. (gep.) Kompanien were commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Dieter Kohler, Georg Preuß and Heinz Tomhardt. <sup>32</sup>

On 9 November 1944 eleven members of the battalion were awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class: SS-Unterscharführer Günther Janzen and Karl Behnke of the 9. (gep.) Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Urbat, Hans Weilak, and Günther Berghaus (company headquarters section leader) of the 10. (gep.) Kompanie; SS-Unterscharführer Gabriel Ehweiner from Meran (South Tyrol) and platoon leader SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Rayer of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie; and, the company commander SS-Hauptscharführer Jochen Thiele, the cannon platoon leader SS-Oberscharführer Emil Knappe, the cannon vehicle commander SS-Rottenführer Karl-Heinz Fetzer, the driver of Unterscharführer Kindler's cannon vehicle, SS-Rottenführer Ernst Höppner, and the cannon vehicle commander SS-Rottenführer Karl-Heinz Rodenstein of the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie (30 October 1944). 33 Thirty-two soldiers received the Iron Cross, 2nd Class. The veteran, highly decorated SS-Hauptscharführer, Max Leike of the 9. (gep.) Kompanie, was promoted to SS-Untersturmführer. The men wounded in Normandy came back and new recruits arrived to make up for the heavy losses sustained by the battalion.

On 12 November 1944 the commander of the schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen, visited Jochen Peiper. 34 The Tiger Battalion had been rebuilt in the area of the Holte Castle. Presumably Peiper and von Westernhagen, his old friend since 1941, discussed the upcoming attachment of the Tiger battalion to the Panzer regiment. The battalion was to be provided with two companies of Tiger II (King Tigers) and one company of Jagdtiger. 35

The members of the 9. (Pi.) Kompanie became eyewitnesses to the way the Americans and English waged war against Germany in November 1944. Right in front of them, in the vicinity of the Midland Canal, south of Espelkamp, a passenger train on a secondary line was attacked at low level by allied fighter-bombers and bombed and strafed with cannon fire right. There were dead and wounded among the civilians on the train. This represented only one of the many war crimes carried out by the Allies in Germany, which were clear violations of the Geneva Convention and the Hague Convention for Land Warfare.

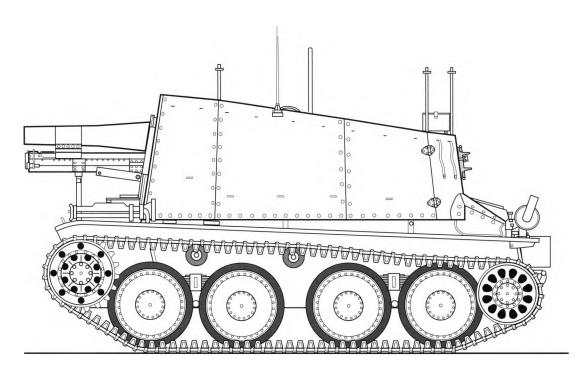
In the meantime, the training period for the tank companies of the I. (gemischte) Abteilung in Wietzendorf had come to an end and Peiper devoted three days for an examination of the training level attained. <sup>37</sup> During this period SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser an ethnic German from Romania, experienced the following:

While we were in Wietzendorf Peiper came around on an inspection at the end of training. He called me down from my tank and said to me: "I have received a telegram from Berlin concerning you. Report to me tomorrow!" When I did so he

questioned me closely concerning my wife's whereabouts and he wanted to know more about Depner, who was the area youth leader (author: for the Germans in Romania), Andreas Schmidt and the Volksgruppe. A few days earlier I had received a letter from Depner, and he had indicated to me that I would be ordered to Vienna by Berlin and we would be able to get together then. At first I didn't understand this news. During the conversation with Peiper Vienna came up again and again, and he pressed and wanted to know more from me.

On the next day, I reported to Peiper in the battalion orderly room. He asked: "What's going on? I'm supposed to send you to Vienna." I answered that I didn't know anything about it.

However, he continued to press and finally said: "Okay, if you don't tell me, I'll use my sources in Berlin." After two days, he sent for me again and said: "Be careful. You are supposed to be attached to a parachute operation in Transylvania. You should know that I have had a teletype sent to Berger that you were wounded on the invasion front and that I don't know where you are. You're in trouble if you give me a hard time! This is insane; I'm not going to send a trained tank commander into an operation that will be useless right from the beginning." <sup>38</sup>



"Grille" 15cm sIG 33 (Sf) auf PzKpfw 38(t) Ausf H
Courtesy of George Bradford



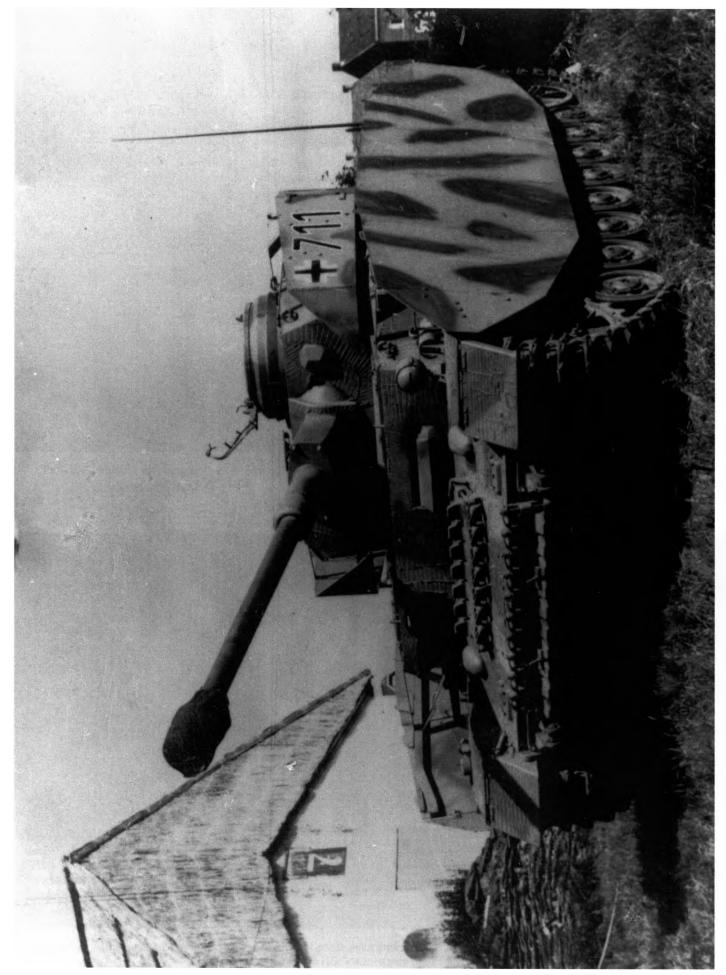
SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling commanded the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 from 1 December 1943 until he was wounded in Normandy on 20 August 1944. In March 1945 he assumed command of the schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501.



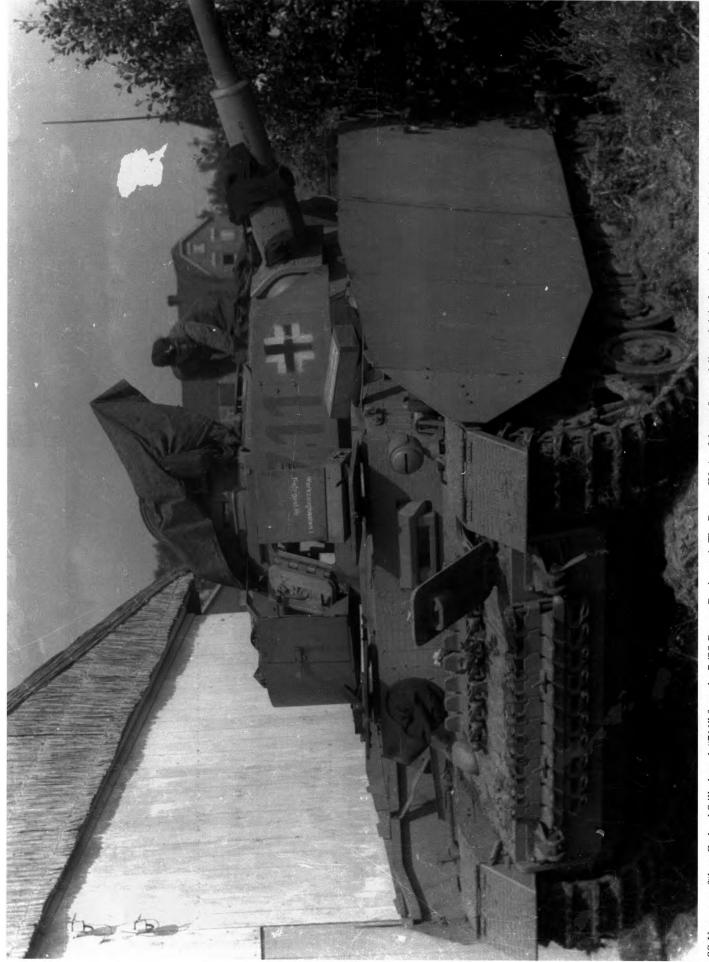
Knight's Cross winner SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Wendorff, Adjutant II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



Veteran tank commanders of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Oberscharführer Theo Jensen and Schendel (right). Jensen was killed in Normandy and was posthumously awarded the German Cross in Gold on 5 January 1945.



The Panzer IV's of the 7. Kompanie received their camouflage at Ursel. Here: "711" of the platoon leader of the 1st platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller.



SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller's tank "711" from the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. The Panzer IV, Ausführung J, was delivered right from the factory and had received only the base coat of paint. This photo was taken at Ursel on 11 June 1944 in the course of preventive maintenance. The coaxial machine gun was removed from the turret and mounted on the antiaircraft machine gun mount on the commander's cupola in anticipation of the road march. It is covered by a protective tarpaulin.



Quad Flak of the regimental Flak platoon of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



Tank commanders of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1: SS-Oberscharführer Hans Siptrott, winner of the German Cross in Gold, and SS-Unterscharführer Werner Höh.



Jochen Peiper.



Men of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 provide a wedding party escort for their commander, Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, at his wedding on 16 June 1944 at Knesselare (Flanders).



Peiper with the young couple.



The divisional judge advocate, SS-Hauptsturmführer Jochum, performed the marriage ceremony in a the small castle of Knesselare. The Wolff's on the left with Jochum and Peiper sitting opposite.



Helga and Werner Wolff.
Their wedding bands lie in front of them.



Signing their marriage certificate.



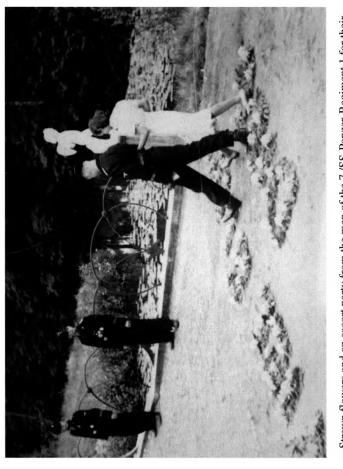
Marriage witness Knight's Cross winner SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Wendorff (left), signs the document. Right: SS-Obersturmführer Benoni Junker.

SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling, commander of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.





The castle at Knessleare, the site of the wedding of Werner Wolff.



Strewn flowers and an escort party from the men of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 for their company company commander and his bride.

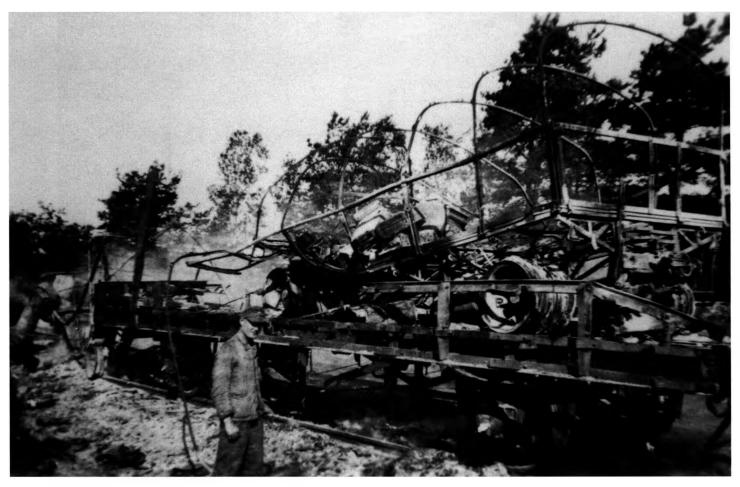


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Tank "724" of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 while preparing to move by rail on 17 June 1944. In the turret: gunner Heimbach.



Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 moved to the front earlier than the Panzer regiment of the LAH. Here a Tiger of the 1. Kompanie on 7 June 1944 at Morgny. Tank commander: SS-Unterscharführer Werner Wendt.



June 1944: transport train of the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 which was attacked by Allied fighter-bombers and burned out.





At Chaise Dieu (Normandy) the 12. (s. gep)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was equipped with six SPW with 7.5 cm cannon in July 1944. They moved to the invasion front with them on 16 July 1944.



SS-Unterscharführer Werner Kindler, cannon platoon leader in the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was awarded the Nahkampfspange in Gold, the German Cross in Gold and the Wound Badge in Gold.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal assumed command of SPW-Bataillon of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in July



SS-Oberscharführer Helmut Feldvoß, cannon platoon leader in the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in Normandy, the Ardennes, Hungary and Austria. Among his awards: the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Nahkampfspange in Bronze.



SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt, commander of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 from June 1944 to the end of the war. He had been platoon leader in the company prior to that. He was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, the Nahkampfspange in Silver and the Wound Badge in Gold.



Eduard Maron, a platoon leader in the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was a veteran who had seen combat in every theatre of the war. Awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, the Nahkampfspange in Silver, and many other awards, he died in 1945 as a SS-Hauptscharführer.



SS-Rottenführer Fritz Karg, SPW driver in the 9. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, the Nahkampfspange in Bronze, the Panzerkampfabzeichen in Bronze and many other decorations.



The crew of Peiper's command tank: SS-Unterscharführer Horst Schumann (continuous wave radio operator), SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl (voice radio operator), SS-Unterscharführer Otto Becker (driver). The gunner was SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Jahn and the tank commander was Peiper.



SS-Oberscharführer Hans-Manfred Niehrenheim, headquarters section leader in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



On the invasion front movement was only possible at night or under the heaviest camouflage. Here: a vehicle of the 9./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 with SS-Unterscharführer Schwarz and SS-Rottenführer Lemanscheck.



SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Sametreiter was the second Knight's Cross winner in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 besides Werner Wolff.



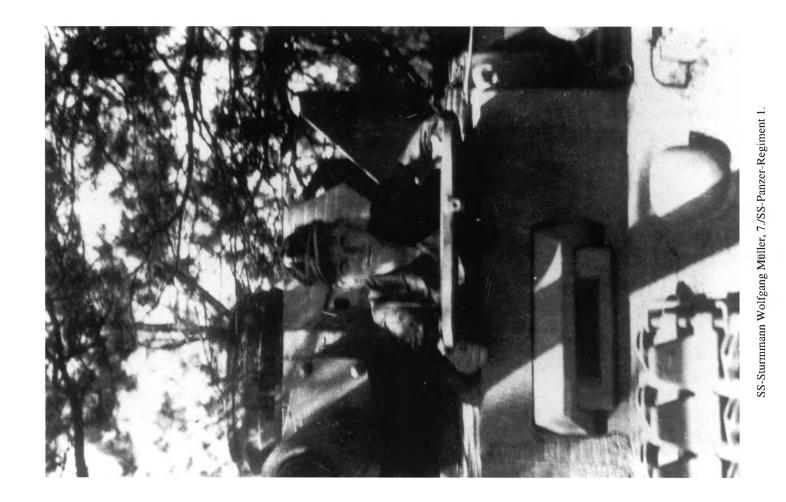
In the woods at Gimbosq, southeast of the Orne, around 2 July 1944. SS-Sturmbannführer Heinz Kling, commander of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, with the commander of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Streipart, and the Spieß, SS-Hauptscharführer Adolf Jensen (reporting).

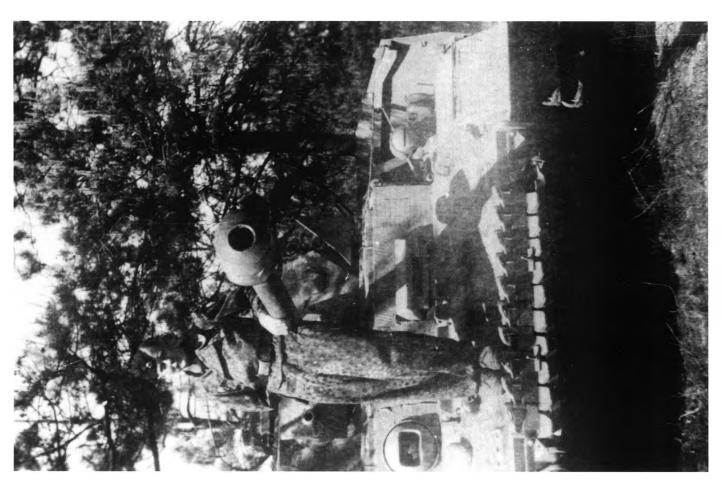


SS-Sturmmann Heinrich Kahlen, gunner in SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff's command tank in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



Kahlen and SS-Sturmmann Wolfgang Müller.







The Panzer Regiment took up ready positions in the large forest at Cinglais during the first half of July, 1944. Here: dug-in Panzer IV "711" of the 7. Kompanie with radio operator Teichert.



View towards the enemy from the vision slit of a Panzer IV.



SS-Unterscharführer Werner Mager, tank commander in the combat reconnaissance platoon of the Panzer regiment, observes in the direction of the enemy.



 $SS-Unterscharf \"uhrer\ Gerhard\ Man \rand\ Rudi\ Knobloch,\ veteran\ front-line\ combatants\ of\ the\ 10.\ (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment\ 2.$ 



Normandy, June 1944. Men of the combat engineer platoon of the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 (from the left): Sepp Maier, Günther Ludwig, SS-Unterscharführer Willi Pluschke, Edi Moser (killed in action on 19 December 1944) and Georg Imler.



Grenadiers of the 7./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 Rgt. in July 1944. Right: SS-Unterscharführer Mendel, a former paratrooper in the Luftwaffe. He is wearing the paratrooper badge.



Normandy, July 1944. SS-Sturmbannführer Heinz Kling, commander of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller, platoon leader in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and, later, commander of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Hauptscharführer Walter Braasch, platoon leader in the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, here seen as a SS-Unterscharführer.



The commander of the 1.(schwere) SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Haupsturmführer Werner Poetschke.



Panther "R02" with an interesting insignia – a panther jumping through a hoop with an overlaid lightning bolt.



The same Panther. Here: the "LSSAH" can be seen scratched into the Zimmerit on the turret.



Assault gun of the Leibstandarte moves into action. Daytime movements were only possible in Normandy using the greatest amount of camouflage possible.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann, commander of schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 101, while discussing operations on 18 July 1944 with SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann, the commander of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, prior to fighting the English at Soliers and Hubert-Folie.



SS-Rottenführer Adolf Reichert of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



The 17-year-old SS-Panzerschütze Egon Kreis of the 8/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. He was reported missing in action in March 1945.



SS-Junker Karl Zumpe, tank commander in the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1  $\,$ 



SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, commander of the 2. (Panther) Kompanie, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 31 October 1944 for his actions on 18 July 1944. He was killed in action in Hungary on 21 March 1945.



SS-Unterscharführer Günter Gaul, tank commander in the combat reconnaissance platoon of the Panzer regiment.



SS-Rottenführer Leo Thau, tank driver in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was taken prisoner on 16 July 1944 after being knocked-out at Hill 112.



SS-Unterscharführer Karl Menne, mortar squad leader in the 10. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 until he was wounded on 8 August 1944. He received the Iron Cross, 1st Class, the Panzerkampfabzeichen and the Nahkampfspange in Silver.



SS-Oberscharführer Willi Pluschke, combat engineer platoon of the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, received the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Nahkampfspange in Silver, in addition to numerous other decorations.



SS-Oberscharführer Fritz Kosmehl, continuous wave and voice radio operator (the latter in Normandy), in Peiper's command tank. He lost his eyesight. After the war, he visited Peiper regularly in Traves.



SS-Unterscharführer Hermann Schummann, gunner in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Sturmmann Hermann Rüter, loader in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Oberscharführer Herbert Thurow, tank commander in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Here seen as a SS-Unterscharführer.



SS-Unterscharführer Hauck, tank commander in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. He was transferred from the Luftwaffe and wore the Luftwaffe Flak badge.



SS-Untersturmführer Fritz Böcker, platoon leader in the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was killed in action on 12 July 1944 at St. André-sur-Orne by an artillery round. In this picture he was a SS-Standartenoberjunker. He was the first sergeant of the 11. (gep.)

Kompanie until the summer of 1943.



SS-Unterscharführer Walter Müller of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. He was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Nahkampfspange in Silver.



SS-Sturmbannführer Heinz Kling (right front).



SS-Obersturmbannführer Albert Frey, the commander of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, appears deep in thought.



Canadians captured by the SPW-Battalion.



Noncommissioned officers of the staff of the Panzer regiment. From the left: SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Kosmehl (voice radio operator for Peiper), SS-Oberscharführer Otto Becker (Peiper's tank driver), SS-Unterscharführer Hans Hillig (signals platoon), SS-Unterscharführer Willi Micheluzzi (signals section leader) and SS-Unterscharführer Horst Schumann (continuous wave radio operator).



A Canadian Sherman knocked out by SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller on 1 August 1944 with two hits They are clearly visible on the turret ring and the side hull.



The SPW-Battalion and the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 fought at Tilly-la-Campagne in July 1944. In this picture: tank "711" belonging to the platoon leader was dug in up to its return rollers, approximately 1 meter deep. The crew dug a trench under the tank to give it protection from artillery fire.

The branches could be pulled away with a wire. On 25 July 1944 Stiller knocked out three Canadian tanks from this ambush position.



Starting 5 August 1944 SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke commanded the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Unterscharführer Alfred Benick of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Unterscharführer Helmut Urbat (from Allenstein in East Prussia) of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 received the Nahkampfspange in Silver on 5 June 1944 and the Iron Cross, 1st Class on 9 November 1944.



Men of the Headquarters Company of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 on 3 August 1944 at Falaise. From the left: Tutschek, unknown, Löser and Jürgens.



Knight's Cross winner SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff, commander of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, held Tilly against repeated attacks of the Canadians.



SS-Unterscharführer Reinbold Giencke, tank commander of Panzer "747" of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Normandy. He died of his wounds on 15 July 1944 at Sées.



View from the cupola of a Panzer IV of the combat reconnaissance platoon of the Panzer regiment. Ahead of it is a destroyed SPW.



Tanks of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in August 1944.



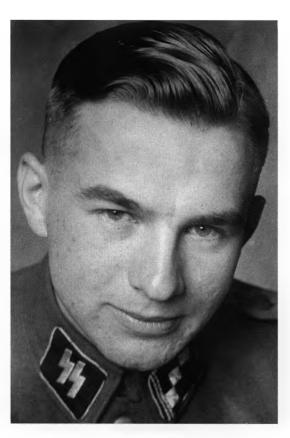
Panzer IV of the combat reconnaissance platoon of the Headquarters Company of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. A cat has been painted on the turret side armor.



Tanks of the 7. Kompanie in August 1944 between Tilly and Domfront.



SS-Unterscharführer Hans-Joachim Redecker, 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, who was killed in action on 14 August 1944 at Carrouges (Normandy). Among his many decorations, he also wore the Nahkampfspange in Silver.



SS-Obersturmführer Erhard Gührs, awarded the Nahkampfspange in Silver and the Iron Cross, 1st Class, was badly wounded on 9 August 1944 at St. Barthélemy while serving as the adjutant of the SPW-Battalion.



SS-Sturmmann Günther Mollnau, radio operator in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Unterscharführer Werner Mager, tank commander in the combat reconnaissance platoon of the Panzer regiment.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann, commander of the schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101, was killed in action on 8 August 1944 at Cintheaux.





SS-Obersturmführer Sepp Armberger, commander of the 8./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross on 31 October 1944. He was killed in action on 21 August 1944 in Normandy. Among other decorations, he was awarded the Ehrenblattspange, the Wound Badge in Gold, the Nahkampfspange in Bronze, the Infantry Assault Badge in Silver, the general Assault Badge, the Panzerkampfabzeichen and four individual tank destruction strips.

SS-Unterscharführer Werner Mager, tank commander in the combat reconnaissance platoon of the Panzer regiment.



SS-Obersturmführer Gerd Jahn, platoon leader in the 2/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in the east, assumed command of the 3/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in August 1944.

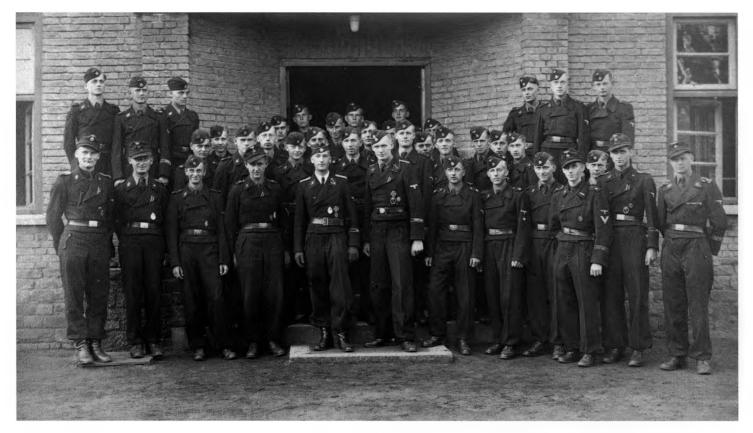


SS-Rottenführer Hans Baumann of the 5. Kompanie/SS-Panzer-Regiment I who, contrary to regulations, wore two Panzerkampfabzeichen next to one another. On the right is the second level of the award with the numeral "25" for 25 days of tank combat.





SS-Sturmmann Racher and SS-Sturmmann Masthoff of the Headquarters Company of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



The "gunner" platoon in the training company on 13 August 1944. SS-Obersturmführer Gerd Jahn (middle) and SS-Untersturmführer Richard Herrmann (to his left).



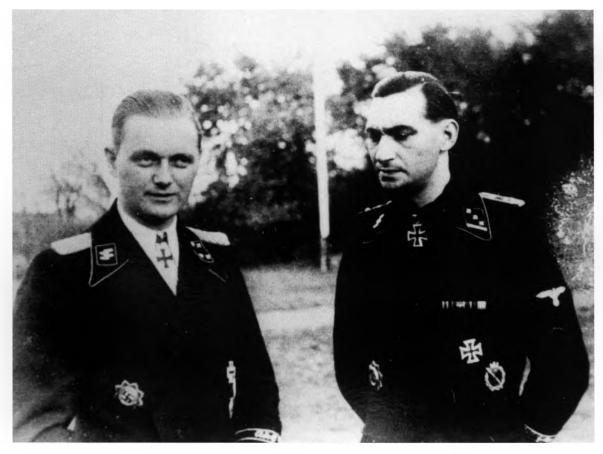
SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, commander of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, on 18 July 1944 after the successful attack at Soliers, where the Panther battalion knocked out 126 English tanks. Malkomes was wounded by a shrapnel to the face. Left: SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann, commander of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. The photo was taken in La Hague.



Memorial cemetery at St. Andre for the soldiers of the Leibstandarte.



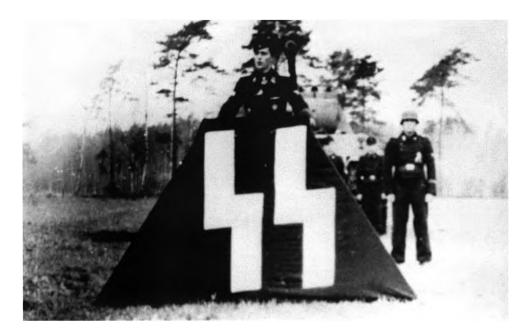
The "tank commander" platoon of the training company at Zonhoven (Flanders) in August 1944. In the middle: SS-Hauptscharführer Konrad Heubeck wearing the German Cross in Gold.



SS-Obersturmführer Hans Malkomes, commander of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 31 October 1944. Left: SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann, the former commander of the I. (Panther)/SS-Panzer Regiment 1.



Peiper in November 1944 in Westphalia during the reorganization of the Panzer regiment. Here being saluted by an officer of the Hitlerjugend.



The Panzer regiment assembled on 9 November 1944 at Rahden for an awards ceremony. Peiper addresses the men of his regiment.

SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff, Peiper and Grühle.





SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke commanded the I. (gemischte) Abteilung of the regiment.



View from the ranks of the regiment towards the speaker's podium of Peiper.



Peiper presents awards to the proven soldiers of Normandy. On the left: regimental adjutant SS-Hauptsturmführer Gruhle.



Peiper and Hans Gruhle



Peiper pinning an award.





SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke with men of the I. Abteilung. On the left: SS-Obersturmführer Friedrich Christ, who temporarily assumed command of the 2. Kompanie for Malkomes.



Knight's Cross winner SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff was awarded the Ehrenblattspange for his performance with 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 at Tilly in July 1944.



Knight's Cross winner SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Otto Dinse, commander of the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was wounded in Normandy. He was awarded the Nahkampfspange in Gold on 1 September 1944.



SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke and his adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer.



SS-Untersharführer Valentin Bersin (left) with his Panther which was parked behind Peiper's speaker's podium.

## Preparation for the Ardennes Offensive: 18 November to 15 December 1944

Soon after, they began to pack up. SS-Untersturmführer Güther Borchers was the rail loading officer for the Panzer regiment, with SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser serving the same function for the I. (gemischte) Abteilung. They were loaded in Soltau. In the period up to and including 18 November 1944 the Leibstandarte was moved by rail into the area west of Cologne. The Panzer regiment took up billets in the vicinity of Weilerswist; Peiper's staff was at Weilerswist. Peiper wrote:

The companies were deployed far apart from each other in small wooded areas. The crews were housed dug-in under their tanks. Training continued ...

... Despite everything, the morale of the troops was exemplary. No pathos, no political motivations and no fanaticism at all, which the enemy propaganda liked to conjure up about us. In its place was a melancholy "end-of-the-world" mood, a farewell to all that for which one had fought and suffered and a defiant determination to make it as difficult as possible for the victors even at the end.

The SPW-Bataillon was in Poll and Gladbach at that time. SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal's command post was at a farm in Gladbach. The men had dug in their SPW, some of them as far as the top of their tracks. The SPW-Bataillon was once again fully equipped with SPW and other new weapons, including triple-barrel Flak and twin machine guns, which had originally been used by the Luftwaffe. The 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie gave up one of its three cannon platoons and in exchange received three SPW with the 2 cm triple-barrel Flak.<sup>3</sup> The six SPW of the dissolved cannon platoon were used to form a cannon section of two SPW each in the heavy weapons platoons of the 9., 10. and 11. (gep.) Kompanien. Each of these companies was fully organized with four platoons each. Triple-barrel Flak SPW were also present in some of the other SPW Kompanien as well.

Officers with experience on all fronts were at the head of every company in Diefenthal's SPW-Bataillon. The 9. (gep.) Kompanie was commanded by SS-Untersturmführer Max Leike, a courageous 33-year-old officer from Bontow, who had previously commanded the company's heavy weapons platoon. SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß had commanded the 10. (gep.) Kompanie since April 1943 and, as "Chainmail" Preuß, was one of the best known and daring officers in the battalion. SS-Obersturmführer Heinz "Bubi" Tomhardt had commanded the 11. Kompanie since 1943. All of them had been awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, the Nahkampfspange in Silver and the wound badge, along with other decorations. Many of their noncommissioned officers and men were also highly decorated. SS-Hauptscharführer Jochen Thiele led the 12. (s. gep.) Kompanie. He had repeatedly led the company in 1943/1944 as a noncommissioned officer. He had won the Iron Cross, 1st Class with Kampfgruppe Diefenthal in its last operation. SS-Obersturmführer Wolfgang Lüdecke commanded the Supply Company. The platoon leaders in these companies were young officers and veteran noncommissioned officers.

The men were witnesses to a terror attack of American bombers on Düren during this period. It caused numerous casualties among the civilian population and transformed the town into a sea of rubble. Jochen Peiper wrote about it:

A wet and cold December day, just like the ones preceding it.

Despite that, around 1000 hours, there was an all-too-familiar droning in the air. The earth began to tremble and in the western skyline the clouds began to rise from the impact of bombs and fires. Düren was the objective for the Allied attack. A never-ending stream of four-engine bombers dropped 2703 tons of high-explosive and incendiary bombs and destroyed 95 percent of the completely defenseless city. 1030 hours, call from division: SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 immediately employs all available wheeled vehicles for rescue and recovery operations in Düren.

A blend of brick dust, dirt and smoke blanketed the unfortunate city. Upon approaching closer to the city the eye was offered a vista of senseless destruction. The highest objects were transformed into the lowest, power lines were hanging down, rubble blocked the streets and water was streaming out of the ripped open sewage lines. But there was no way to put out the fire. Local fires had already spread to area conflagrations and the storm unleashed by them scoffed at all human attempts at rescue.

Despite that, the tankers moved on foot into the inferno, freed people pinned by beams in life-threatening situations, carried others into the open, escorted women and children into safety and performed First Aid everywhere. The widespread destruction which lay before them was worse than at the front. What was even worse was the feeling of powerlessness and helplessness which came over them in the face of this catastrophe. Despite all that, the men gave their utmost and avoided neither burns nor injuries. Encouragement and orders were unnecessary. Everyone was filled with the desire to help and also filled with horror, sympathy and rage! You heard the words "Those bastards" everywhere. "If we could just get them. This isn't war, it's mass murder!"

Because of the upcoming, although still unannounced, Ardennes Offensive, the divisional units had been given cover missions to explain the presence of the Leibstandarte in this area to the enemy. Peiper's Panzer regiment was told to prepare for employment in the Aachen area for operations in the Roer sector. These cover missions, as well as shortages of ammunition and fuel, severely hindered training. For these reasons Peiper was unable to carry out exercises at company level or higher, as was also the case for the Panzergrenadiere and the artillery. To compensate, he emphasized training for the unit leaders, practiced taking up ready positions and carried out map exercises for the company commanders and platoon leaders at Weilerswist and later in the Blankenheimer Woods. He conscientiously prepared the officers for the approaching operation. His officers made their situation evaluations according to the principle: What can I do? What am I doing now? What am I accomplishing?

Concerning his mission objectives Peiper said: "At that time, we all expected a breakthrough by American combat forces in the Düren area. For that reason, the division had assigned us to make a tank thrust on the flank that was to halt the American breakthrough. This topic was discussed during terrain exercises."

On 3 December 1944 the I. (gemischte) Abteilung of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 consisted of 37 Panzer IV's and 38 Panthers. Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, which had also arrived at Weilerswist by 3 December, had 34 Tiger II's, but was not yet completely outfitted. The Leibstandarte's operations officer, SS-Sturmbannführer Ziemssen, described the Division at that time as "only fit for defensive missions."

On 11 December 1944 a conference was held at Führer Headquarters "Adlerhorst" (Eagle's Nest) in Bad Nauheim for all

commanders in Army Group B down to the divisional level. Adolf Hitler presented an address which Generalfeldmarschall Model's adjutant compared in significance to that given by Frederick the Great before the Battle of Leuthen.7 On the afternoon of that same day, SS-Brigadeführer and Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Fritz Kraemer, the Chief of Staff for the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee, asked Peiper for his opinion of an attack in the Eifel and for the time that the Panzer regiment would require for a night march of more than 80 kilometers. In order to provide a precise answer to this last question, Peiper had the stretch Euskirchen -Münstereifel - Blankenheim driven in a Panther and came to the conclusion that 80 kilometers could be covered in one night if the road were clear.8 Tipped off by Kraemer's question, Peiper got his first inkling of an upcoming action in the west, presumably in the Eifel, and that part of it located in Belgium, the Ardennes. On the same day, Peiper discussed the attachment of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 to the Panzer regiment as its II. Abteilung with SS-Obersturmbannführer von Westernhagen.9

## **Preparations and Mission Assignment for the Ardennes Offensive**

The German offensive in the Ardennes, "Wacht am Rhein", which is inseparably linked to the name of Jochen Peiper in historical writing, has been treated in detail in this biography. A minute and detailed study of this offensive operation in its entirety will not be attempted here for reasons of space. Moreover, it is not the subject of this book.

The idea for the Ardennes Offensive originated with Adolf Hitler himself.

The 6. SS-Panzer-Armee had received the mission to break open the American positions between Hellenthal and Ormont with the 12. and 227. Volks-Grenadier-Divisionen and the 3. Fallschirmjäger-Division, and then to break through on the left with the 1. SS-Panzer-Division and on the right with the 12. SS-Panzer-Division. These divisions were to reach the Meuse between Lüttich and Huy within one to two days, holding on to bridgeheads there until the II. SS-Panzer-Korps had regrouped to continue the advance to Antwerp. For this purpose, the Leibstandarte was assigned to march routes D and E. The problem was that those roads were in a variety of conditions, and in no way were they suitable everywhere for tanks.

During the night of 13/14 December 1944 the Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment moved into a new assembly area in the northern part of the Blankenheimer Woods, which it reached by 1000 hours. Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 was on both sides of the Zingsheim - Engelgau road. During the morning of 14 December 1944 Peiper was ordered to the divisional command post in Tondorf where, for the first time, SS-Oberführer Mohnke informed him and the other regimental commanders of the planned attack in the Ardennes on 16 December 1944. Peiper discovered that his Panzergruppe would play the most important role within the offensive. Disregarding threats to his flank, he was to use the advantage of surprise to smash into the American rear west of Losheimergraben and get to the Meuse between Lüttich and Huy as quickly as possible. During this conference the avenues of advance were made known and maps distributed with the necessary information.2 The Panzer regiment was assigned march route D.

After returning from this conference, Peiper task organized the

Panzergruppe he would command in the coming attack at his command post in the Blankenheimer Woods Forest House. Panzergruppe Peiper, which was also officially designated as "Panzergruppe LSSAH", was constituted as follows. Along with SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke's I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, under SS-Obersturmbannführer von Westernhagen, was attached to the Panzer regiment to make up for its missing II. Abteilung. The III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, under SS-Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal, was a part of the Panzergruppe as it had been in Russia. In addition, the I. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 1 (SS-Hauptsturmführer Kalischko), the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzerpionier-Bataillon 1 (SS-Obersturmführer Sievers), the 13. (IG)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 (SS-Obersturmführer Koch) and Flak-Abteilung 84 of the Luftwaffe (Major von Sacken) were attached to Peiper. The I. Abteilung of the artillery regiment no longer consisted of "Hummel" or "Wespe" self-propelled artillery but of 10.5 cm field howitzers.

During the afternoon of 14 December 1944 Peiper assembled the commanders of the units attached to him, in order to inform them of the offensive. On the following day, at 1100 hours, he participated in a conference at the command post of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps in Schmidtheim. The commanding general of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps, SS-Gruppenführer and Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS Hermann Prieß, the divisional commanders of the Leibstandarte and "Hitlerjugend" Divisions, SS-Oberführer Mohnke and Kraas, other Kampfgruppe leaders, and SS-Obersturmbannführer Skorzeny also participated. In the afternoon Peiper issued orders and assigned objectives to the officers of his Panzergruppe orally. The commander of the 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Birnschein, was present at this conference of Peiper's:

The regimental commander required us and our men to give our all with the remark that these were probably the last weapons which our homeland could provide for us. Von Westernhagen, our commander, handed out the maps to us and, along with these maps, informed us of the march route, organization, and mission for our battalion.<sup>3</sup>

That evening the company commanders addressed their men and informed them of the coming attack. The written version of the regimental orders were only distributed to the commanders after midnight on the night of 15/16 December. They contained the usual tactically oriented verbiage. The commanding general of the I. SS Panzer-Korps, SS-Gruppenführer and Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS Hermann Prieß, read it: "It had the usual paragraphs for a normal regimental order. I remember that the paragraph concerning march formations and the order of march was very long."

The comprehensive preparations for the offensive ran with calm, focused precision during the short time still available, including the exact determination of the route of advance, clarification of supply and ration questions, and the exact organization of the long march column. Peiper's attack route was ordered along avenue of advance D through Losheim – Losheimergraben – Büllingen – Möderscheid – Ondenval – Engelsdorf – Stavelot – Trois-Ponts –Werbomont-Hamoir – Tinlot as far as the Meuse, which he intended to cross at Huy or Ombret Rawsa.

The organization and equipment was firmly established for Panzergruppe Peiper. Each of the four Panzer-Kompanien in the I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 had three platoons with five Panzer IV's or V's, as well as one tank each for the company commander and his company headquarters section leader, so that each company possessed a total of 17 tanks. The regimental staff and the staff of the I. Abteilung staffs each had three tanks, one each for the regimental commander, the adjutant and an orderly officer. Just before the start of the offensive, schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 received 11 more Tiger II's from Panzer Abteilung 509, and so was fully equipped with 45 Tiger II's (King Tigers). Each of its three Panzer companies had three platoons of four Tigers each with two additional company headquarters tanks, so that each company had a total of 14 Tigers.<sup>5</sup> With the four companies of the SPW battalion and the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 as well as the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 (these last two companies had only been able to equip their first two platoons with seven SPW each), Panzergruppe Peiper had considerably more than 100 SPW available. Along with the Panzer IV's, Panthers, and King Tigers, Peiper had armored Flak, armored combat engineers, infantry guns, artillery, and a Luftwaffe Flak battalion with 2 cm and 3.7 cm Flak. It was a strong combat force.

Peiper placed especial emphasis on the organization and deployment of his Panzergruppe. In the front was a specially formed armored advance guard unit under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck of the 6. Kompanie. It was composed of two Panthers and five Panzer IV's as well as two SPW of the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. The tank commanders in this led unit were specially selected from several different companies. Along with Sternebeck, they were: SS-Untersturmführer Hans-Jürgen Bahrendt (1. Kompanie); SS-Untersturmführer Herbert Junker and SS-Oberscharführer August Wien (5. Kompanie); SS-Untersturmführer Karl-Heinz Asmussen and SS-Hauptscharführer August Tonk (6. Kompanie); and, SS-Scharführer Horst Rempel (8. Kompanie). The SPW commanders were SS-Oberscharführer Dörr and SS-Rottenführer Wemmel.6 During the attack the tank commanders would not be with their companies; they were independent of them. As there was a surplus of four Panzer IV's in the companies, these were made available to the advance guard, so that these four Panzer IV's would not take away from the combat strength of the 6. and 7. Panzer-Kompanien. Only two Panzer IV's and two Panthers were taken from the companies for the lead unit.

Peiper organized the units assigned to him in the way that he believed would give him the greatest tactical advantage in employing them. The tank and SPW companies therefore did not move out as integral company units, but in several cases were separated into platoons and distributed at various point within the march column. For the coming offensive, Peiper appointed SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke's adjutant, to serve as his adjutant. Orderly officer SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Kramm took over the duties of adjutant in the I. Abteilung for the time being. Peiper's adjutant, SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Gruhle, was to remain with the support troops to ensure the Panzergruppe's supplies. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser, who initially was not assigned combat duties, received orders at Rahden on 14 December 1944 to go to the Panzer regiment immediately and to report in at the Blankenheimer Woods Forest House. Poetschke had requested him for his adjutant.8 All of the Panzergruppe's vehicles which were not needed for combat were to move at the rear of the march column. Only messengers, fuel carriers and ammunition carriers

were allowed to move forward to the combat elements.

## Ardennes Offensive: 16 December to 24 December 1944

On the night of 16 December 1944 the long preparations were over and the German offensive in the west began. The units of Panzergruppe Peiper slotted into their assigned positions in the organization of the march column and waited at the Kaiserhaus Forest House along German Route 51. At 0200 hours the I. SS-Panzer-Korps reported to the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee that the approach march had been completed. Many of the men of the Panzergruppe got no sleep during this ice-cold night. They were too excited by the thought that finally they were again going onto the offensive. They knew that their opponents would be the Americans whose year-long bombing attacks had converted Germany into a heap of rubble. They all knew the deadly danger which threatened Germany and that in the east the Soviets already stood on the border of their country and had crossed it in places.

Immediately before leaving the assembly area at Blankenheimer Woods between 0100 and 0200 hours, SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt addressed his 11. (gep.) Kompanie of the SPW-Bataillon one more time:

I pointed out the significance of the coming offensive for Germany's future. I appealed to each and every man to fight bravely and hold nothing back. I spoke of our responsibility to our homeland which had once again provided us with new weapons in spite of the terror bombing. I then gave a few tactical details, such as the preparations for the offensive with artillery and dismounted infantry, the major operation of the Luftwaffe and of the mission of the Panzergruppe.\(^1\)

At the beginning of the Ardennes Offensive, Panzergruppe Peiper was organized as indicated in the table on the following pages.

At 0530 hours on 16 December 1944 an artillery bombardment rang in the Ardennes Offensive. At 0800 hours the units of Panzergruppe Peiper were placed immediately behind the front occupied by the 12. Volks-Grenadier-Division which had already launched its attack on the American positions at Losheim and Losheimergraben. After the breakthrough had been made, it was its mission to advance to Büllingen, in order to open attack route D so that Panzergruppe Peiper could continue its advance.

Only after considerable fighting was the 12. Volks-Grenadier-Division able to take Losheim, but it was unable to capture the Losheimergraben railroad station (Buchholz). Hour after hour went by. During the afternoon, Peiper stayed at the command post of the 12. Volks-Grenadier-Division in order to be able to order the Panzergruppe into action immediately after the breakthrough. He was unable to give that eagerly awaited order until 1630 hours, and shortly thereafter was standing one kilometer west of Scheid in front of the demolished bridge, which the 12. Volks-Grenadier-Division engineers were unable to repair because they did not have sufficient bridging materials. Jochen Peiper reported:

As the railroad crossing wasn't finished yet, my group skidded down the railway embankment and, driven by necessity, crossed the steep ravine just a few meters away from the railway bridge. Toward sundown the crossing was completed and we reached Losheimergraben, which lay under heavy artillery fire. There I received orders from corps headquarters by phone not to continue on the original attack route but swing west to Lanzerath. The

#### SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Ostubaf. Jochen Peiper

Adjutant:

SS-Hstuf. Hans Gruhle (SS-Ustuf. Arndt Fischer)

Orderly:

SS-Ustuf. Walter Torns (KIA: 17 Dec. 1944)

SS-Ostuf. Rudi Mäule

SS-St.O.Jk. Siegfried Haneberg Supply Company Commander: SS-Stubaf. Konrad Unger

#### I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Stubaf. Werner Poetschke

Adjutant:

SS-Ustuf. Arndt Fischer (KIA: 17 December 1944) SS-Ustuf. Kurt Kramm (KIA: 18 December 1944)

SS-Ustuf. Rolf Reiser

Orderly:

SS-Ustuf. Kurt Kramm SS-Ustuf. Hans Steininger

#### Headquarters Company, I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Ustuf. Rolf Buchheim Terrain Reconnaissance Platoon Leader:

SS-Hstuf. Paul Ochmann Signals Platoon Leader: SS-Ustuf. Rolf Buchheim Unknown Duty Position:

SS-Ustuf. Pulst

## Supply Company, I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Hstuf. Ernst Otto

Battalion Surgeon:

SS-Hstuf. Dr. Rudolf Neumayer Battalion Maintenance officer: SS-Ostuf. Otto Ibenthal Administrative Officer SS-Ustuf. Pulst

### 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Karl Kremser

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Hennecke SS-Ustuf. Konrad Heubeck SS-Ostuf. Adolf Thomas

#### 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Friedrich Christ

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Hubert Kaufmann SS-Hscha. Heinz Knappich SS-Ustuf. Helmut Koch

#### 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Benoni Junker

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Hans Steininger SS-Ustuf. Karl-Heinz Asmussen

SS-Hstuf. August Tonk

Headquarters Company:
SS-Ostuf. Rudi Mäule
Signals Platoon Leader:
SS-Ustuf. Horst Krause
Regimental Surgeon:
SS-Hstuf. Dr. Kurt Sickel

Regimental Maintenance Officer: SS-Ostuf. Horst Gülden Administrative Officer:

SS-Hstuf. Ernst Drube

### Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501

Commander:

SS-Ostubaf. Heinz von Westernhagen

Adjutant:

SS-Ustuf. Eduard Kalinowsky

Orderly:

SS-Ostuf. Paul Sernetz Special Duty Officer: SS-Ustuf. Heinz Belbe

#### Supply Company, schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501

Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Paul Vogt Battalion Surgeon:

SS-Hstuf.

Dr. Wolfgang Rabe

Battalion Maintenance Officer:

SS-Ostuf. Georg Bartel

Administrative Officer:

SS-Obersturmführer Alfred Veller Battalion Transportation Officer: SS-St.O.Jk. Hubert Hartmann

#### 1./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501

Commander:

SS-Ostuf. Jürgen Wessel

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Rolf Henniges SS-Ustuf. Heinz Buchner SS-Ostuf. Jürgen Brandt

#### 2./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501

Commander:

SS-Hstuf. Rolf Möbius

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ostuf. Wilhelm Dollinger SS-Ustuf. Georg Hantusch SS-Ustuf. Walter Hahn

#### 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501

Commander: SS-Hstuf, Heinz Birnschein

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Thomas Amselgruber SS-Ustuf. Winfried Lukasius SS-Hscha. Rolf von Westernhagen

#### 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Hstuf. Oskar Klingelhöfer Platoon Leaders: SS-Ustuf. Heinz Rehagel

SS-Ustuf. Erich Münkemer SS-Oscha. Hans Siptrott

#### 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Erich Rumpf

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Günther Hering SS-Ustuf. Paul Lenk SS-Ustuf. Werner Kühn

#### 10. (Flak)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Karl-Heinz Vögler

Platoon leaders:

SS-Hscha. Paul Schräder SS-Oscha. Waldemar Hechler SS-Oscha. Otto Forstner

## Maintenance Company, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Wilhelm Ratschko

### III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

Commander: SS-Hstuf. Josef Diefenthal Adjutant: SS-Ustuf. Karl Flacke Orderly: SS-Ustuf. Hubert Kindermann Signals officer: SS-Ustuf. Otto Hofbauer (KIA: 17 December 1944)

9. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

Commander: SS-Ustuf. Max Leike

Platoon Leader:

SS-Oscha. Lothar Bergmann

...

#### 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Georg Preuß

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Oscha. Rudi Knobloch

SS-Oscha. Otto

SS-Oscha. Eduard Maron

SS-Oscha. Werner Aschendorff

## 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Heinz Tomhardt

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. Willi Horn SS-Hscha. Heinz Hendel SS-Uscha. Heinz Klipp SS-Oscha. Rudi Rayer

#### 12. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

Commander: SS-Hscha. Jochen Thiele

Platoon Leaders: SS-Oscha. Paul Pfalzer SS-Uscha. Helmut Feldvoß SS-Uscha. Toni Motzheim

#### 4. (leichte)/schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501

Commander: SS-Hstuf. Wilhelm Spitz

Armored Combat Reconnaissance Platoon Leader:

SS-Hscha. Martin Appelt

Combat Engineer Platoon Leader:

SS-Ustuf. Walter Brauer

Flak Platoon:(Converting to new equipment; did not

participate in the offensive)

## Supply Company, III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Gren.-Regiment 2

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Wolfgang Lüdecke

Battalion Surgeon:

SS-Ostuf. Dr. Willibald Dittmann Battalion Maintenance Officer:

SS-Ostuf. Kurt Mielke

## 13. (IG)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 (Attached)

Commander: SS-Ostuf. Koch

Gun Platoon Leader:

SS-Oscha. Alfred Kleinwächter

...

## 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 (Attached)

Company Commander: SS-Ostuf. Franz Sievers

Platoon Leaders:

SS-Ustuf. August Seitz SS-Oscha. Max Beutner SS-Ustuf. Rudolf Kämpfe SS-Oscha. Kern

### Flak-Abteilung 84 (Luftwaffe) (Attached)

Commander: Major von Sacken

1. Battery

2. Battery

3. Battery

4. Battery

9th regiment of the 3. Fallschirmjäger-Division had been stopped in Lanzerath and was reporting heavy resistance from the Büllinger Forest. This regiment was attached to me and I was to get it going again.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of the offensive Peiper traveled only in his command Panther. Among his crew were continuous wave radio operator SS-Rottenführer Wilhelm Nußhag, voice radio operator SS-Rottenführer Paul Schierig and driver SS-Oberscharführer Otto Becker.<sup>3</sup> Peiper's adjutant for the operation, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, traveled behind Peiper in his Panther. Later Peiper continued on in an SPW.

While turning into Hüllscheid, the lead tanks ran into an uncleared German minefield and lost two Panthers. Peiper had not been informed of the minefields laid by the German units withdrawing from the West Wall and, for reasons of security, there had been no reconnaissance in the offensive sector. There was a short conference in SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß' SPW, with Peiper, Poetschke, and Fischer taking part. SS-Obersturmführer Erich Rumpf's armored engineers cleared the mines. The Panzer IV of the advance guard commander, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, also hit a mine just southeast of Merlscheid, and Sternebeck had to transfer to SS-Untersturmführer Karl-Heinz Asmussen's tank and take its crew. At this time Peiper was in the SPW of the commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal, and was traveling behind the lead vehicle of the advance guard.5 SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer traveled behind Peiper.

Peiper reached Lanzerath toward midnight. In the Café Scholzen the commander of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9, Oberst von Hoffmann, reported to him that the Büllinger Forest was heavily mined and occupied by strong enemy forces. For this reason he did not feel that he was in a position to attack in the dark. In spite of the corps order, Hoffman refused to subordinate his regiment to the command of the lower ranking Peiper. To Peiper's question as to whether he personally had seen the American positions in the Büllinger Forest, von Hoffmann answered that one of his battalion commanders had reported it to him. When Peiper then asked this commander, it turned out that he had received this information from a Hauptmann in his battalion. And then that Hauptmann was summoned and questioned by Peiper whether he had seen the enemy positions.

His answer dumbfounded Peiper. The Hauptmann hadn't seen these positions himself, but "... he had been told." "Now I got really annoyed," Peiper recalled, "and ordered the Fallschirmjäger regiment to attach a battalion to me with which I would lead the breakthrough." At that point Oberst von Hoffmann said to him: "My dear Peiper, you can do what you want. You concern yourself with your mission, and I'll carry out mine." In this atmosphere, already exasperated by von Hoffmann's demeanor, a dispute developed between him and Peiper, which revolved around whether the paratroopers were actually attached to Peiper by orders from the corps. These forces were to be used to break the resistance in the Büllinger Forest the following morning. Valuable time was being squandered.

Peiper organized his Panzergruppe in Lanzerath during the night. After a conference with his commanders around 0100 hours on 17 December 1944, Peiper organized the Panzergruppe for an attack, moving two Panthers up to the front, as well as an

SPW platoon of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß with two triple-barreled Flak of Preuß' Company behind them.<sup>8</sup>

At 0400 hours in the early morning of 17 December 1944 Peiper launched an attack on the Büllinger Forest by the II./ Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9 under Major Taubert. However, they were quickly surprised. "We broke through the woods without firing a shot and discovered that it was entirely unoccupied." Peiper was angry over the senseless loss of time. "There was neither enemy resistance nor mines in the woods. The paratroops had in fact not attacked it earlier, preferring instead to stay in warm quarters in Lanzerath." <sup>10</sup>

On the other side of the wooded area, the lead armored elements under SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck encountered their first Americans, who immediately took flight in the darkness. The Losheimergraben railway station to the right on the other side of the road was occupied by the enemy. Around 0430 hours, the lead armored elements entered Honsfeld, which was a total surprise to the Americans there. Peiper recalled:

As we pushed into Honsfeld at high speed at first light, we awoke an American reconnaissance battalion. The antitank guns were unmanned; the streets, roads and yards were full of armored vehicles, jeeps and trucks, and we were watched from the windows by the sleepy eyes of hundreds of speechless GI's. We pushed on through, sent a few bursts of machine gun fire into the houses and continued on to Büllingen. It was our intention to let the paratroopers clear the place.<sup>11</sup>

Only after most of Peiper's Panzergruppe had raced through Honsfeld did the overrun Americans realize the disaster that had befallen them, and a few offered sporadic resistance to the following Panthers and paratroopers. SS-Unterscharführer Willi Kritzler's Panther "232" and SS-Unterscharführer Walter Puplik's Panther "235" of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 were destroyed by antitank guns before Honsfeld.12 Two armored Flak carriers of the 10. (Flak)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 were destroyed in Honsfeld and the company commander, SS-Obersturmführer Vögler, was wounded. After treatment, he remained with his company, which was distributed along the march column. When a Tiger from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, which was carrying paratroopers from the 14./Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9, later ran into antitank gun fire near the cemetery in Honsfeld, the paratroopers jumped off, the Tiger rammed a wall and destroyed two antitank guns. The Tiger had been hit four times without effect. After that, the paratroopers discovered an American supply dump and supplied the Tiger crews passing through from its contents.<sup>13</sup> Some 50 armored scout cars and half-tracks were captured in Honsfeld.14 Most of the Fallschirmjäger battalion remained in the village, while a company-sized element stayed on the tanks of the Panzergruppe. The paratroopers continued with the Panzergruppe and accompanied Peiper's entire advance.15

Shortly after 0600 hours, the lead armored elements in Honsfeld moved on. Continuing the advance – without hindrance until then – the armored elements ran into an American airfield some two kilometers south of Büllingen, where there were reconnaissance aircraft with idling propellers on the runway. Twelve aircraft were destroyed by a determined action of the heavy weapons platoon of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Untersturmführer Werner Aschendorff. Just before it could be reached by the SPW, one aircraft was able to make an emergency

takeoff and the pilot received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his act from the 99th US Infantry Division, a high decoration. The commander of the lead elements, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, described the continuation of the advance:

Back again on the road to Büllingen, the Panzer IV in front of me was destroyed by infantry weapons at a point with poor visibility a few hundred meters from the entrance to the village. The crew was shot down as they bailed out. There were no survivors! In a wild charge, with every weapon firing, the rest of the armored elements pushed into Büllingen. The enemy was in a state of complete confusion; in spite of everything we had still managed to achieve surprise. The enemy was unable to put up any organized resistance.<sup>17</sup>

The tank commander who had been killed at the fork in the road to the south of Büllingen was SS-Obersturmführer Horst Rempel. His tank was destroyed by Sergeant Grant Yager of the 924th Field Artillery Battalion's supply battery with a bazooka. Shortly afterwards he and a few of his comrades were taken prisoner by an SPW crew. After a period as a POW, Yager returned to the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Sternebeck and SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß' 10. (gep.) Kompanie broke into Büllingen, which was described by Peiper: "In spite of furious antiaircraft, machine gun and rifle fire, Preuß pushed through Büllingen with only two SPW, sowed confusion and made it possible for the Panzergruppe to take the village." The crews in their open-top SPW took casualties from the heavy fire from the houses at Bülingen. The platoon leader of the 1. Kompanie in Preuß' 10. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Knobloch, was wounded.

Peiper recalled that SS-Unterscharführer Karl Übler, commander of the cannon section of the 10. (gep.) Kompanie, "pushed into the village of Büllingen in reckless disregard of personal danger, paying no attention to murderous fire from all sides and, in savage street and house-to-house fighting from strongpoint to strongpoint, broke through their defense."<sup>20</sup>

An American fuel dump was discovered near the west side of Bülingen. The armored vehicles stopped and, as artillery began to fire on them, the crews dragged the canisters to their tanks and SPW, filled their tanks and then continued the advance. On the road to Amel, at the crossing near point 616, they turned onto a country road to Schoppen. The 25-kilometer-long march column of the Panzergruppe vanished after the halt to fuel up at Büllingen. Jochen Peiper was in SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal's SPW, the commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. From a military point of view, this was not the best decision he could have made as it was an unnecessary risk for two major unit commanders to travel in the same vehicle.<sup>21</sup>

Morale was high in Peiper's Panzergruppe as the advance continued and even fuel could be found. The company runner for the 12. (schwere gep.) Kompanie, SS-Sturmmann (officer candidate) Helmut Naumann, wrote:

More than anything else I remember from that period of advance, that we captured a lot of material. American trucks had been abandoned at the side of the road, and we found cans of real coffee, which for a long time we had scarcely tasted, and a lot of chocolate. At that time we gobbled so much chocolate that we became totally constipated. The American combat boots and the yellow leather gloves were favorite items among the troops. The

tank drivers were able to make good use of the captured gasoline cans and their contents. All in all we were really exhilarated in those few days of advance, after having been continually forced to retreat in the past.<sup>22</sup>

Numerous prisoners were taken at Büllingen. SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß got out from under a hail of bullets in Büllingen at top speed and then ran into an American column and drifted along to their rear in their ranks. Initially, it didn't occur to the Americans that German SPW were traveling among their own vehicles. Preuß wasn't able to get loose until they reached a patch of woods. He destroyed an American outpost there in close combat and wasn't able to make his way back to the Panzergruppe until later. For his performance in the lightning quick capture of Honsfeld and Büllingen, Peiper recommended Georg Preuß from Danzig for the Knight's Cross, despite the fact he frequently had different opinions than his commander.

During the fighting at Büllingen, SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck crossed the village and, instead of west, moved north to Wirtzfeld. About one kilometer past Büllingen, a Panzer IV in his lead element was hit in the commander's cupola and its commander, SS-Oberscharführer August Wien, was killed.23 Sternebeck realized that he had taken the wrong route. He made radio contact, then turned back and drove through Büllingen at top speed and at the western exit turned onto the road leading to Domäne Bütgenbach. Just before Domäne Bütgenbach some American doctors approached him and tried to surrender the 47th American Field Hospital to him. But Sternebeck had his group turn again and moved along the road before Domäne Bütgenbach leading south to the crossroads at point 616, where he turned onto the road running from Büllingen to Möderscheid. His armored lead element at that point consisted of only two Panzer IV's, his own and one commanded by SS-Hauptscharführer August Tonk, and two SPW commanded by Dörr and Wemmel of the 9. Panzer-Pionier-Kompanie. He met the Panzergruppe's advance guard at point 616, two kilometers west of Büllingen.

On the soft and muddy roads, the Panzergruppe traveled through Möderscheid, Schoppen, and Ondenval without enemy contact. Some of the tanks left the roads and churned their way across the wet, muddy fields. Four Jeeps with two officers and nine men of the US 32nd Armored Regiment's Reconnaissance Company ran into Peiper's Panzergruppe and were taken prisoner. As the advance continued, shortly before or at Thirimont, another Jeep ran into the Panzergruppe, with an American lieutenant colonel in it. Peiper got into the Jeep and interrogated him. He discovered the staff of the US 49th Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade was in nearby Engelsdorf and the Americans were ignorant of the exact location of the Panzergruppe which had broken through.<sup>24</sup>

The advance of the Panzergruppe had slowed and it reached Thirimont toward 1100 hours. The 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 turned to the west there over country roads and fields to try to reach the Malmedy – Engelsdorf (Ligneuville) road (N 23) and capture the American staff in Engelsdorf as quickly as possible. Because of the bad terrain conditions, the Panzergruppe was unable to take this short cut. It had to continue along the roads leading to the northwest, turn to the southwest at the crossroads at Bagatelle onto N 32 coming from Weismes and, after a short stretch, turn south on N 23 at the Baugnez crossroads toward Engelsdorf. At this time SS-Obersturmbannführer Peiper

was behind the lead elements and in front of the advance guard.

After the lead element had left Thirimont and continued its advance along the narrow road over flat land, which was bounded on the right by patches of woods but with a clear view to the left, the men discovered a column of American trucks at about 700 meters to their left (west). These trucks were approaching the Baugnez crossroads, four kilometers southeast of Malmedy, on route N 23, heading south.

In the next few minutes those events would occur which a year and a half later were to bring Peiper and 73 other members of his Panzergruppe, corps, and army to trial and conviction. Even today, certain voices tirelessly and continuously advance the socalled "Malmedy Massacre" as clear proof of the supposedly criminal conduct of the "Waffen-SS" in combat. And even today, this case is cited to support the blanket criminalization of the entire Waffen-SS by many journalists, as was claimed by the victorious powers at the Nuremberg Trials. On the American side, one cannot underestimate the role played by the emotions raised by the subject of Malmedy, which is not always considered with factual objectivity. Since for many people the name Joachim Peiper is, more than anything, inseparably linked with the Ardennes Offensive and the uncertain events at Malmedy, an attempt will be made in this biography to offer an objective consideration of these events as they really happened. A detailed examination, including exhaustive detail, must however be postponed for a further study, which is in preparation, and which will devote itself exclusively to an examination of this case. Determined to treat this subject only with sober objectivity and balance, the author has attempted to portray the events at the Baugnez crossroads on that sad noon of 17 December 1944 using primary sources, trial testimony and numerous depositions.

The lead element, commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, was the first to encounter the American truck column. It was made up of B Battery of the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion. Sternebeck recalled:

During a halt for observation about 800 to 1200 meters to the east of the Baugnez crossroads, I detected an enemy truck column going through the crossroads toward the south on the road from Thirimont. The lead elements opened fire (explosive shells) against the moving column, which was some 200 to 300 meters south of the crossroads. A few vehicles immediately burst into flames and the column dispersed. The crews jumped out and took cover. This was the moment to immediately push forward to the crossroads along the Weismes - Baugnez road. Even before reaching the crossroads, we were fired on by dismounted crews with machine guns and rifles. We replied to their fire immediately with our on-board machine guns and attacked the immobile column at high speed. When my point tank approached to within 60 or 70 meters of the column, the Americans stood up from the fields and the road ditches, raised their hands and surrendered. We then slowly approached the column. By hand and arm signals, I made them understand that the American soldiers were to march back toward the crossroads. I reported my encounter with the enemy, the firefight and its result back to the Panzergruppe by radio. Once again, I was told to advance to Engelsdorf without delay. Between the armored lead elements and the advance guard with the command group, there was a time lapse of about 10 minutes.25

The two SPW from the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 were

traveling behind Sternebeck and Tonk's tanks. The two or three American prisoners traveling in SS-Oberscharführer Dörr's SPW, who had run into the lead elements earlier, left the SPW and joined the other prisoners on the field there.<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of the fighting, Jochen Peiper was still on the opposite road. He wrote:

When we had left Grosbois, north of Thirimont, my lead elements discovered an American convoy on its left moving south on the Malmedy – St. Vith road. At the time they were clearly identified, I was driving in a Jeep a couple of hundred meters back, questioning an American lieutenant colonel who had run into our column. From him I found out that a senior American staff was located in Engelsdorf and that no one had any idea that we were in the area. When I heard that I raced forward to the lead tanks and had them cease fire and keep going without delay. Maybe it was still possible to surprise Engelsdorf too, it spite of the battle noise which had occurred at such an unfavorable moment. When we reached the crossroads and swung to the south, the way was partially blocked by destroyed and burning trucks.

There were a number of American soldiers in the ditches and the field next to the road, I would estimate that there were about 60. Disregarding those who had been killed or wounded by our fire, one really had to differentiate among three groups: The first group was the men who approached the road with their hands behind their helmets and who surrendered. We sent them back, since it was the job of the following infantry to collect what we didn't have time to do along our line of advance. Group two lay next to the road and played dead. I can still remember clearly some of our soldiers firing warning shots. The third group was also playing dead, but it was closer to the nearby woods. These soldiers tried to get to the edge of woods without attracting notice, and we fired a few shots at them. The lead element then continued on in the direction of Engelsdorf, while the POW's more or less on their own assembled at the crossroads. There exists more than one version concerning what was supposed to have happened later at the crossroads, but no one knows exactly, and I don't either.27

The Panther of Peiper's adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, was the first tank moving behind the lead element tanks. The crew watched the fighting at the crossroads from the near side. Peiper was still riding in Diefenthal's SPW, which was immediately behind Fischer. Fischer left his tank and reported to Peiper the contents of a radio message he had just received, according to which there was indeed an American antiaircraft artillery brigade staff located in Engelsdorf. He thereupon was ordered by Peiper to inform Sternebeck at once to get the lead element on its way to Engelsdorf at high speed and secure the bridge there. Following that, SS-Untersturmführer Fischer transmitted orders to the main body of Panzergruppe Peiper to also head for Engelsdorf immediately. Arndt Fischer reported:

It was clear that the lead element, consisting of only two Panzer IV's and a few SPW, was very weak. As there were no other fighting vehicles available, we (my Panther and behind me Peiper and Diefenthal in the SPW) continued on toward Engelsdorf. There was still some shooting at the crossroads in question, and some American vehicles were burning. American soldiers were going back along the column of vehicles toward the crossroads with their hands up. A few of our soldiers were busy on the road collecting the prisoners ... We were able to get our tanks past the col-

umn without serious hindrance, and moved on, as fast as the slippery and sloping road surface would permit, to Engelsdorf.<sup>30</sup>

The SPW-Bataillon adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Karl Flacke, was moving in his SPW immediately behind the SPW of his commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal:

The end of the enemy column had just passed the crossroads, while the point of the column was already some 800 to 900 meters from it, when the tanks of the I. Abteilung and the SPW machine guns started firing. I could see that, after initial attempts to escape, the column stopped and the people left their vehicles to take cover. At that point, the lead element of our Kampfgruppe moved forward and reached the crossroads. When I reached the crossroads in my SPW behind my commander, there was already a number of American soldiers assembled in front of the inn, which was located right at the crossroads. At that time I would estimate the number of POW's there at about 20 men. About 150 meters after the crossroads I left my SPW. I ran along next to the SPW and took map materials from the approaching American soldiers which were very important for our combat operations. Eight hundred meters past the crossroads, I reported to my commander and climbed into his SPW to join the fighting already developing in Engelsdorf. The commander of the Kampfgruppe, Obersturmbannführer Peiper, was also in my commander's SPW, which he had mounted because of radio problems in his command tank.31

Neither Peiper nor Diefenthal left the SPW either at the cross-roads or in front of the Americans there. Along with the two commanders in the SPW, there was the driver, SS-Unterscharführer Paul Zwigart, the signals section leader, SS-Unterscharführer Paul Fackelmeyer and the radio operator, SS-Rottenführer Hans Assenmacher.<sup>32</sup> They had not had enough time to dismount since reaching their next objective, Engelsdorf, took priority. This was also confirmed by Peiper's orderly officer, SS-Standartenoberjunker Siegfried Haneberg: "I rode a motorcycle almost right behind the lead tanks and motioned the prisoners to the rear with my thumb."<sup>33</sup>

The 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 came within sight of the crossroads relatively soon after the lead elements. The leader of the heavy weapons platoon of the 11. Kompanie, SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Rayer, moved in his SPW as the trail platoon. Rayer stated:

Shortly before reaching the main road, I saw an American truck column coming from Malmedy which was forced to stop by our fire. As we continued along, my platoon and I reached the crossroads where, along with the American vehicles, I saw some 12 to 15 American prisoners. There were more American prisoners coming from different directions on their way to the crossroads.<sup>34</sup>

SS-Sturmmann Willi Braun was in an SPW with a 7.5 cm gun of the 11./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2:

We fired the gun and machine gun from our cannon SPW. Then when we arrived right at the crossroads, there were some prisoners standing in a field and a few coming along the road to this collection point. But, because we didn't have much time, we continued to move along without worrying about the prisoners.<sup>35</sup>

The armored vehicles stopped suddenly and fired on a column of American trucks and jeeps. The Americans were taken prisoner and put in a field. One tank and a SPW remained there, but I didn't know any of the crews. Shortly after that Peiper arrived and called to us from his SPW: "Move out immediately!" We all

kept going except for the guards.36

How long the tank and SPW remained beside the Americans, and whether they were really there as a guard, is not clear. The trial testimony of the presence of an unknown officer in tank uniform at this place by the members of the lead element is doubtful and unconfirmed. Who could it have been, since there was only one officer in the lead element, Sternebeck, and he had moved on to Engelsdorf. The presence of an officer at the field makes no sense, as Peiper had designated Engelsdorf as an important objective and no officer would have allowed himself to remain passively at the crossroads or in the field.

How did the Americans behave after they had been passed by Sternebeck's lead element? After the first shock the prisoners moved south of Café Bodarwé in an undisciplined manner and thus south of the crossroads into the field next to the road. As a result, they were not clearly identified by the following tanks and SPW as unmistakable POW's. The lead elements had moved on. In the period between the departure of the lead elements and the arrival of the advance guard, there was a lot of lively activity on the field and at the crossroads. Many Americans rescued their personal possessions from the trucks, even those lying in the ditches.

As a result the situation presented itself as at least unclear for the advance guard which was following the lead elements. It would seem logical from a military, as well as from a generally objective point of view, that the advance guard identified the Americans as enemy forces and fired on them which, in turn, caused more casualties. This element also passed the captured Americans and continued on toward Engelsdorf. One tank and one SPW remained behind, halted because of technical problems, at some distance in front of the Americans. During this period there was renewed movement among the Americans for obvious reasons. The leader of the 3rd Platoon of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Oberscharführer Hans Siptrott, halted his tank "731" there:

I went across the field toward the crossroads and came to a stop some 300 meters below it. My other tanks, still moving on the road, also arrived at the crossroads. When I decided to get moving again, my loader Fleps, for reasons unknown to me, fired two shots with his pistol at the Americans, who in the meantime had been disarmed by the infantry. I kicked my loader in the back and hurt my shin. I was standing in my turret hatch and my intercom was switched on so that the crew must have heard me. My radio operator, Arnold, also had his radio turned on, and could later testify that Fleps had gotten no orders from me. It would also have been senseless to fire on someone with a pistol from 300 meters. I then headed toward Engelsdorf with my tanks. When I arrived at my unit, I reported the incident to my commander.<sup>37</sup>

The two pistol shots which Georg Fleps fired from the tank were a reaction to an attempt by a group of Americans to escape toward the nearby woods. There was also a pistol fired from an SPW. An attempt to escape by POW's is legal. However, it must also be considered legal, and is a part of the conventional prosecution of war by every army, that attempted escapes by captured officers and soldiers are to be prevented by force of arms.

There were supposed to have been 113 POW's at noon on 17 December 1944 on that field, of whom 72 were killed there. Relatively close to them there was a tank and a SPW which approached them partly on the road, partly across the field.<sup>38</sup>

Some of the American survivors stated during comprehensive questioning that they clearly heard the words "Stand fast!" before they were fired upon. Lieutenant Virgil Lary and others reported this.<sup>39</sup> Samuel Dobbyns of the US 575th Medical Company explained: "When the German threatened us with his pistol, an American cried "Stand fast!" Right after that the German fired. I ran away and heard machine gun fire after I had run for a ways. When the German fired his pistol, others also ran. That caused the machine gun to fire."<sup>40</sup> Testimony under oath by Sergeant Frank Holtham in October 1945 confirms that the Americans even attempted to flee in two directions.

I decided to attempt to get away and moved slowly to the north, but after I reached a small filthy road or path, I decided not to cross it or go along it. Sergeant Stabulis, Flack and I were in agreement. We turned and went slowly back ... The group of soldiers in front of me was standing quietly and I went slowly southwards to the fence at the south edge of the field, more or less using the men in front of me for concealment. I know that Sergeant Stabulis and Private Flack were behind me. After two thirds of the way to the fence there were no more men there to conceal me. When I reached this point, I ran as fast as I could to the hedge, crawled through it and ran to the right and headed for the woods west of the field as fast as I could. I was fired on by machine guns, but I was lucky enough to reach the woods without getting hit. I was picked up a few days later by the Division ... I wish to add that as I came out from behind the group and raced toward the fence, two shots were fired which I believe to have been fired from either a pistol or a rifle.41

In this initial flight by the American, pistols, rifles, and machine guns were fired from the tank and SPW, and more dead and wounded were a result. After an evaluation of the numerous available testimonies by German and American witnesses - admittedly from entirely different perspectives - there are still considerable contradictions left. According to their testimony, the Americans found 72 dead soldiers on the field and next to the café in January 1945. This is the number which was stated in the official report of the American investigating commission. During the Malmedy trial it was always a question of 84 soldiers killed at Baugnez. Six of the soldiers named on the trial list were not members of B Battery and were not killed on 17 December 1944. Two additional soldiers, named as being there, were officially listed as missing and were not killed on 17 December 1944 at Baugnez. American estimates start with some 55 soldiers killed at the crossroads during the fighting and perhaps some 20 killed during the escape attempt. It is certain, and was proven during the trial in 1946, that on the German side before the Ardennes Offensive, no orders for shooting prisoners were issued by the I. SS-Panzer-Korps or the 1. SS-Panzer-Division to subordinate or attached units. During the period of the offensive in December 1944 in the Ardennes, before and after Baugnez, hundreds of Americans were taken prisoner.<sup>42</sup>

Thus the events at the Baugnez Crossroads on 17 December 1944 present an undoubtedly tragic clash of German and American soldiers which, in the light of the attempted escape among the Americans, left the outnumbered Germans no alternative but to resort to their weapons. Certainly no war crime, no premeditation and no order for the commission of a war crime may be attributed to Jochen Peiper, other commanders, or officers, noncommissioned officers or men belonging or attached to the Panzergruppe, the division, or the corps. The enemy radio station at Calais reported a few days later that American prisoners had

been shot at Malmedy by German troops. Immediately afterwards the I. SS-Panzer-Korps ordered the Leibstandarte to find out from its units whether this was correct, and a similar order was issued by Army Group B on the following day. On 26 December 1944 the division reported to SS-Brigadeführer Kraemer that no prisoners had been shot in its sector. In addition, SS-Obersturmbannführer Skorzeny reported personally to Kraemer on 27 December 1944 that Panzer-Brigade 150 had shot no prisoners.<sup>43</sup>

From 14 to 16 January1945 all of the bodies found by the Americans on the now snow-covered field at Baugnez were autopsied in Malmedy. At least three killed at other places were moved to the field only after 17 December 1944.

After passing the Baugnez crossroads and the American column, the lead element under Sternebeck reached Engelsdorf and secured the bridge around 1345 hours. Soon after, Peiper and Diefenthal reached Engelsdorf along with Fischer's Panther. Fischer stated:

Sternebeck was ahead of us by a few minutes with two Panzer IV's and two SPW in Engelsdorf. Behind me came the SPW with Peiper and Diefenthal. At first I drove carefully into the village, noticed no fighting, and tried to speed across the bridge. On the curve in front of the bridge I was knocked out from behind. A tank hidden by a house had let me run right into a trap. Sternebeck had still had the advantage of surprise. They were waiting for me. As we abandoned our vehicle, we were fired on by rifles and machine guns from the surrounding houses. We burned like torches, because we had fuelled up our tanks from drums and jerry cans a few hours previously at Büllingen, and we had also thoroughly soaked our clothes in the process. Peiper, who had wanted to give me covering fire from his SPW while taking the bridge, was able, I believe, to keep the riflemen in the houses off our backs. Except for our outstanding tank driver, our comrade Wolfgang Simon, the entire crew was able to get out of the vehicle. The way it was explained to me on the following day, he was fatally wounded by the round from the enemy tank and burned up in the vehicle. The units rapidly following us up cleaned out the vicinity. The enemy tank was destroyed. Peiper gave me emergency aid and turned us over to the arriving surgeon. It was not possible to go to the rear, and so I spent the night under the "Star and Stripes" in Brigadier General Timberlake's bed, which I discovered only later.44

Fischer's gunner, SS-Rottenführer Josef Duda, was severely wounded, as were his radio operator and loader, SS-Sturmmann Günter Ikrat and SS-Sturmmann Günter Wesemann.<sup>45</sup> A SPW from the 11. (gep.) Kompanie which reached Engelsdorf behind Fischer was set on fire and destroyed by a direct hit.<sup>46</sup> The SPW with commanders Peiper and Diefenthal was brought under cover at the church, and Peiper intended to try and destroy the M4A3 Tank with a Panzerfaust. A Panzergrenadier from an SPW of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was able to destroy it first.

Preuß' 10. (gep.) Kompanie/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was fighting against elements of the US 14th Armored Battalion east of Engelsdorf. The Panzergruppe's column was by then very badly extended, and for that reason Peiper had his units close up in Engelsdorf. Up to that point, three Panzer IV's and three Panthers each had been lost to mines or antitank fire along with eight Panthers and four Panzer IV's broken down with mechani-

cal problems. A few Tiger II's were also immobile with mechanical problems. Peiper discussed the continuation of the attack toward Stavelot with his commanders. In Engelsdorf he also had a discussion with the divisional commander, SS-Oberführer Mohnke, concerning the continuation of the advance. Toward 1700 hours that afternoon the Panzergruppe moved out and heading west, across difficult terrain with considerable relief, passed through Pont Beaumont and Lodomez on the road to Stavelot which ran along the edge of the hill and dropped off steeply to the right. In the dark on the precipitous road to Stavelot, an initial attack pushed past the first houses and around a sharp corner right up to the bridge across the Amel. As the enemy had effectively blocked its narrow approach with two antitank guns, the attack was initially halted.

Up to that time during the advance, the Panzergruppe had sent few radio messages. The main radio net control station of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 under the signals section leader, SS-Unterscharführer Hans Hillig, was traveling with the main body of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, but under radio silence to prevent enemy radio location finding. In addition, a radio net control station from the signals platoon was in the Panzer regiment's march column. <sup>47</sup> SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Buchheim's radio net control station for the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was traveling relatively far forward in the march column. He had equipped an SPW with a sheet metal roof and carried a 30-Watt and two VHF radio sets with him. <sup>48</sup> In addition the Panzergruppe had been assigned a radio-SPW from the 2./SS-Panzer-Nachrichten-Abteilung 1 under SS-Oberscharführer Sepp Diener with an 80 Watt transmitter and a Berta receiver. <sup>49</sup>

In the early hours of 18 December 1944 Jochen Peiper found himself in a house in the western part of Vaulx-Richard. The Panthers of the 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, under SS-Obersturmführer Kremser, were designated to initiate the attack against Stavelot and moved forward. The lead element was to be the 1st Platoon, led by SS-Untersturmführer Hans Hennecke, who was briefed at Peiper's command post during the night. At this time the Panthers of the 2. Kompanie, under SS-Obersturmführer Christ, and Diefenthal's SPW-Bataillon were behind the 1. Kompanie. The 6. and 7. Panzer-Kompanien and the 3. (gep.) Pionier-Kompanie were being considered for another mission by Peiper. With that reorganization, the former armored lead element under Sternebeck was replaced by the 1st platoon of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie. During the night, SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke and his signals officer, SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Buchheim, were continuously moving on foot in order to be with the men of the I. Panzer-Abteilung on the narrow road before Stavelot.50 An SPW crew from the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 dismounted and moved through the high woods left of the road toward Stavelot until they encountered and eliminated an American patrol in a Jeep.51

The mission of taking the bridge across the Amel at Stavelot was given to SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt's 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, which had only two platoons available that far forward in the march column. Toward 02:00 hours on 18 December 1944, Tomhardt dismounted his men from the SPW of the 1st and 4th platoons under SS-Untersturmführer Willi Horn and SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Rayer. They reached Stokeu, a suburb of the city, and in a rapid assault were able to take the Amel Bridge. They then came under

heavy fire. SS-Oberscharführer Rayer wrote: "The company set up an all-round defense in front of the bridge. At the time, it found itself in a nasty situation. Enemy tanks were continuously rolling up on the other side of the bridge and we expected a counterattack. We were taking fire from all sides, without being able to do much against it in the darkness." 52

Although the bridge was taken, it couldn't be held by the weak company, in position on one side of the bridge and under fire from all sides. SS-Obersturmführer Tomhardt was wounded and SS-Untersturmführer Horn and other men were killed. On Diefenthal's orders, SS-Oberscharführer Rayer took over the company. At the first light of dawn German tanks appeared and the attack began.<sup>53</sup> Armored combat engineers from the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 came to the support of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie and checked the bridge to ensure it could not be demolished.<sup>54</sup> A squad of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie occupied the flat roofs of the first houses in Stavelot and from there observed the effects of fire from snipers, with Belgian civilians among them. Shortly after that, the attack on Stavelot began. Peiper had designated SS-Oberscharführer Erich Strelow's Panther as the lead tank.

When he reached the city, Strelow drove around a curve and suddenly saw two antitank guns 50 meters in front of him which covered the important bridge at the entrance to the town. SS-Oberscharführer. Strelow immediately recognized that the bridge was of great importance to the battalion's advance and had to be taken. The enemy opened fire furiously on the point tank with antitank gun, 2 cm guns and infantry weapons. Without hesitating for a moment, Strelow moved forward to the two antitank guns, rolled over them, eliminated the enemy flanking fire with smoke, rolled over another antitank gun, took the bridge, and so opened the way into the city for the company.

That was how SS Sturmbannführer Poetschke described the action of the point tank shortly after it occurred.55 SS-Rottenführer Eugen Zimmermann, who was identified as the tank commander in the divisional history "The Leibstandarte" volume IV/2 on page 81 ff., wasn't the commander but rather the gunner in Strelow's Panther. The driver was SS-Rottenführer Heinz Biwald and the loader SS-Sturmmann Hans Hoffmeister. Zimmermann remembered that the tank was hit on the gun mantlet by an antitank gun after crossing the bridge, which destroyed the optical sights. At that point, Strelow rammed the corner of the house and rolled over the 5.7 cm antitank gun there.56 The commander of the 1. Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Karl Kremser, was wounded and put out of action while taking the bridge and the leader of his platoon, SS-Untersturmführer Hans Hennecke, lost his Panther "111" to enemy fire before the bridge. Hennecke transferred into Kremser's tank, crossed over the bridge and drove through Stavelot.57

Hennecke took over the 1. Kompanie at that point. The Panthers of SS-Untersturmführer Heubeck and SS-Oberscharführer Thomas of the 1. Kompanie drove over the bridge behind him. Mile the Panthers were still fighting at the bridge, the tanks and SPW of the entire Panzergruppe were lined up on the steep road outside of Stavelot, waiting for the attack. The Americans launched a flank attack from the wooded terrain to the left of the Panzergruppe. The SPW-Bataillon beat back this dangerous assault and afterwards, the commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal, put himself at the head of his battalion, attacked into

Stavelot, advanced up to the bridge and held it open<sup>59</sup> Jupp Diefenthal was later awarded the Knight's Cross for that action. Belgian civilians also participated in the fierce fighting in Stavelot, some of whom fired rifles from windows and roof panels at German soldiers from behind and into the open-topped SPW.<sup>60</sup> Every vehicle had to pave its way through a hail of bullets at Stavelot. Peiper wasn't aware that the gigantic fuel dump for the US 1st Army was located north of Stavelot at Francorchamps.<sup>61</sup> The tanks and SPW drove as far as the market square, then turned left toward the west and left the city along route N 23 toward Trois-Ponts.

Shortly before Trois-Ponts, a major railroad viaduct passed over a curve to the right, which was immediately followed by a second curve.

"The Americans had laid a mine barrier of 20 to 25 mines at Trois-Ponts in front of two important bridges for the continuation of our advance. Strelow bailed out immediately, personally cleared the mines, and eliminated the antitank gun and machine gun cover ..." wrote Poetschke. Estrelow's gunner, Eugen Zimmermann, had aimed the tank cannon over open sights directly at the 5.7 cm antitank gun. He described what happened next after driving under both bridges. "Watch out as we go under them, I thought, there's got to be another antitank gun here. No, it was quiet! But the bridge to the left was blown up. Sturmbannführer Poetschke and Obersturmbannführer Peiper came up on foot and took a look at the sorry mess. Oh well, on to the right." Erich Strelow was later named in the Honor Roll of the German Army for his measured actions.

Directly behind both bridges, the N 23 joined the north-south route N 33 at Trois-Ponts. Originally, Peiper wanted to turn south on N 33 to get to the road to Werbomont. However, as the bridges over the Amel and Salm had been blown up by the enemy, Peiper decided to continue to advance to the north on N 33. The Panzergruppe's lead element, consisting of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie led by SS-Untersturmführer Hennecke, passed through Coo and reached La Gleize at 1300 hours where it turned onto the road heading southwest toward Cheneux to get back on N 23, which led from Trois-Ponts to Werbomont. This would have put the Panzergruppe back on its designated attack route D. The bridge across the Amel at Cheneux was undamaged and was crossed by the lead element at about 1330 hours.

For the first time during the offensive, the heavy cloud cover opened up. Shortly after an American reconnaissance aircraft had discovered the long armored column, four P 47 Thunderbolts attacked the Panzergruppe at about 1335 hours. At 1440 hours twelve Thunderbolts dove on the entire march column, which extended all the way back to Lodomez before Stavelot, and strafed and bombed it. The aerial attacks on the column at Cheneux, which was extended along the narrow road with no cover at all, lasted until 1610 hours.64 The tank and SPW crews lay under their vehicles. A few fired at the aircraft. According to what Peiper remembered, three tanks and five SPW were eliminated.65 It is certain that a Panther, turret number "131", was hit between the bridge and Cheneux. An armored Flak "Wirbelwind" of the 10. Panzer-Flak-Kompanie shot a Thunderbolt down in flames and eight other aircraft were damaged. A gun commander of one of the two armored quad Flak at Cheneux reported:

The men on the two guns had sweat on their brows and fear in their bellies, for they were also repeatedly attacked by the aircraft. Their turrets rotated rapidly to the left or back to the right, as required to defend against enemy aircraft. A few tankers had dismounted their coaxial machine guns and were also firing at the aircraft, which simply wouldn't go away. There were already wounded among the tank crews and the grenadiers, and the medics were continuously busy ... When the enemy aircraft turned back after half an hour, Obersturmbannführer Peiper thanked the men of the armored Flak.<sup>66</sup>

The radio in SS-Untersturmführer Buchheim's SPW was destroyed by aircraft on-board weapons. During the air attack Peiper took cover in a bunker full of water west of the Cheneux Bridge opposite the Dumont farm. The farm was hit by a bomb. Hour after hour was taken up caring for the wounded and clearing the damaged vehicles off the narrow road. There were some 40 wounded who had to be given care at the Gillet Mill and in the Vaulx-Renard castle. Jochen Peiper had a message radioed to the division from the SPW of his signals officer, SS-Untersturmführer Krause.<sup>67</sup> The Panzergruppe moved on and the lead elements reached the intersection with the N 23 primary road from Trois-Ponts to Werbomont and continued on its way west. Now it seemed that it was no longer very far to Werbomont, where flatter land began which would be favorable for the use of tanks. After crossing the Ourthe, the Meuse was within striking distance for Peiper.

After the point got to Chauveheid around 2000 hours, and Peiper had given SS-Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal orders to take the bridge over the Lienne at Neufmoulin in a surprise attack, Diefenthal separated from Peiper. The Americans blew up the Lienne Bridge in Neufmoulin right in front of the first Panthers. The explosion was heard by Peiper himself and was confirmed shortly later by a radio message from Diefenthal.

At this time Peiper's signals officer, SS-Untersturmführer Horst Krause, arrived with a few SPW, so Peiper climbed into Krause's SPW and shortly after reached Diefenthal and transferred into his SPW. Peiper was again forced to change his route. He assigned the 10. and 11. SPW Kompanien to reconnoiter and find a suitable bridge over the Lienne which would bear the weight of the tanks. In the meantime darkness had fallen. The 11. (gep.) Kompanie crossed the Lienne at the narrow crossing to the north of Les Forges and drove along the other side until the first of two SPW ran onto a mine. The grenadiers cleared the mines and continued on their way south until they reached the demolished bridge at Neufmoulin, where they were unable to find the N 23 leading to Werbomont in the dark and got to Trou de Bras. At this point the SPW were ordered by radio to turn back.

SS-Obersturmführer Preuß and his 10. (gep.) Kompanie crossed the Lienne four kilometers northeast of Neufmoulin at Moulin Rahier on a crossing which couldn't bear the weight of any tank and, going back on the other side, advanced through Chevron and Habiemont to be stopped by fire from four M10 tank destroyers and three 5.7 cm antitank guns at Oufni. Preuß lost four SPW and 15 Panzergrenadiere. The Americans of the 119th Infantry Regiment reported 5 killed, 30 wounded and 10 missing. They were able to capture one of Preuß' grenadiers and this confirmed the presence of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division in this sector. Since neither of the two Lienne crossings could bear the weight of tanks – as both SPW Kompanien informed Peiper – he pulled them back by radio.

Peiper led his group back through Cheneux at night over the

same route it had traveled that afternoon. On the following day he intended to continue his advance to the west further north by way of Stoumont. The heavy King Tigers of the 2./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 under SS-Hauptsturmführer Möbius and the battalion command group with SS-Obersturmbannführer von Westernhagen, which had traveled further back in the march column, closed up to the lead elements. A few tanks of the 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 under SS-Hauptsturmführer Birnschein also reached la Gleize.71 In Cheneux, Peiper ordered Major von Sacken to stay west of the Amel in Cheneux with his Flak-Abteilung 84, in order to engage pursuing enemy elements. The 5. Batterie of SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 1, which came up later, reached Peiper along with elements of SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 under SS-Sturmbannführer Knittel. They were also brought into positions at Cheneux and near the Vaulx-Renard Castle. Panzergruppe Peiper occupied positions in the St. Anne Forest which lay north of the road running from Cheneux to la Gleize below Froid Cour Castle.

What happened to those elements of the Panzergruppe which had not participated in the attack through Stavelot on the morning of 18 December 1944? Toward 0900 hours Peiper had launched the 6. and 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (SS-Obersturmführer Junker and SS-Hauptsturmführer Klingelhöfer), the 3./SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 (SS-Obersturmführer Sievers) and a paratrooper company in an attack on Trois-Ponts. Around noon, at Wanne, orders reached this group by radio to return to the Panzergruppe immediately. Because of fuel shortages, however, most of the tanks remained at Wanne. A total of five tanks from the 6. and one tank of the 7. Kompanie, including Junker's and Klingelhöfer's command tanks, were fueled with gas from the others. All of the other Panzer IV's of the 6. and 7. Kompanien and the 3rd platoon of the 3./SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 (equipped with trucks) stayed behind at Wanne under SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck. SS-Untersturmführer Konrad Heubeck of the 1. Kompanie likewise remained there. The six tanks and the two armored combat engineer platoons equipped with SPW (SS-Untersturmführer Seitz and SS-Oberscharführer Beutner) of SS-Obersturmführer Sievers' 3./SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 continued on their way to Stavelot, crossed the bridge and then moved on to the west to Peiper, whom they reached by evening.

After that group, a few Tigers of the 1./SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 reached Stavelot and crossed the bridge. The company commander, SS-Obersturmführer Wessel, was in the lead, with SS-Oberscharführer Brandt's Tiger "131", SS-Oberscharführer Wendt's Tiger "133", and one other following. Fighter-bombers attacked the Tigers while crossing the bridge and Brandt's tank was hit in the running gear and halted some 30 meters behind the bridge. SS-Obersturmführer Wessel raced through Stavelot and was hit twice on the hull by antitank gun rounds without effect. Wessel had his tank put into reverse and the driver, SS-Unterscharführer Walter Bingert, skidded the heavy Tiger into house No. 9 on the steep Rue Haute Rivage. Wessel bailed out and climbed into the following Tiger and continued on his way to Trois-Ponts, meeting the Panzergruppe in La Gleize that evening. Because of mechanical problems, other Tigers didn't make it across the Stavelot Bridge and halted at a farm on the Rue de Vieux Château leading to Stavelot.72

On the afternoon of 18 December 1944 Peiper's orderly officer, SS-Untersturmführer Walter Torns, ran into a fighter-bomber

attack at Büllingen and was wounded. When Peiper heard of this he appointed the commander of the Panzer regiment's headquarters company, SS-Obersturmführer Rudi Mäule, as orderly officer. During the night of 18/19 December 1944, in the country estate east of the Froid Cour Castle, Jochen Peiper, together with SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke and SS-Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal, planned the attack on Stoumont. SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Nüske, formerly Peiper's regimental adjutant and now liaison officer in the divisional staff, arrived at Peiper's command post there. Peiper learned that Stavelot could not be cleared but was occupied by enemy elements which had cut his supply lines and blocked any contact with the Panzergruppe.

For example, the entire I./ SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 1 and the major part of schwere panzer-Abteilung 501 were unable to get through Stavelot. SS-Sturmbannführer Gustav Knittel, who had reported in to Peiper, and who had been able to move most of his Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung through Stavelot, was ordered by Peiper to return to Stavelot from La Gleize at first light and to clear a way through the city from the west. <sup>74</sup> It must be mentioned at this point that the Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung was unable to push back into the city against the stubborn resistance in the house-to-house fighting on the west side of Stavelot. It took heavy casualties there.

Peiper didn't find the news of the attack of the other Leibstandarte Kampfgruppen under Hansen and Sandig too encouraging either. Hansen was outside of Recht and Sandig's SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was trudging forward through the muddy roads but was not yet able to intervene in Stavelot. During this cold, foggy December night in the Belgian Ardennes, Peiper once again found no rest.

In the meantime, the fuel supply for his tanks was running low and, because Stavelot was blocked, no supply vehicles could reach him. There were 22 Panzer IV's, 9 Panthers, and 27 King Tigers stuck south of Stavelot, because of mechanical problems or lack of fuel and unable to get through the city. Peiper had 6 Tigers, 19 Panthers, 6 Panzer IV's and a considerable number of SPW of the SPW-Bataillon and the 3. and 9. Panzer-Pionier-Kompanien available. Frightened by the unexpected appearance of the Leibstandarte at Werbomont, the Americans had considerably reinforced Stoumont during the night with tanks and antitank guns.

At 0830 hours, in the morning fog of 19 December 1944, the Panthers of the 2. Kompanie under SS-Obersturmführer Christ and a few Panzer IV's of the 6. Kompanie moved out along Route N 33 toward Stoumont. At the same time, the 9. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under Untersturmführer Leike and the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 under SS-Obersturmführer Rumpf together with paratroopers moved through the woods, dismounted and attacked Stoumont from the south. The 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Oberscharführer Rayer followed the Panthers and stayed back on the road as an immediately available reserve. Elements of SS-Oberscharführer Pfalzer's 1st cannon platoon of the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 participated in the attack on Stoumont.75 It was foggy, so that the Panzergrenadiere were able to surprise the first American antitank gun positions southeast of Stoumont before they could open fire. As the Panthers approached Stoumont from the east, the five Shermans of C Company of the US 743rd Tank Battalion left their ambush positions and fled all the way back to the church.77 The 20-year-old SS-Rottenführer Franz Prahm lead the attack in Panther "223".78

After reaching the outskirts of Stoumont, the tanks ran into heavy antitank gun fire and the attack bogged down. SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke climbed out of his command Panther and very energetically urged the hesitating commander of the 2. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Christ, to speed things up. He then personally joined the fighting in front of the Robinson House, on the left of the road, with a Panzerfaust. The gunner in SS-Rottenführer Prahm's lead tank, Hans-Georg Hübler, described the fighting: "We took several hits from antitank guns one after the other from the direction of the church. This jammed our turret. While I was trying to aim our gun at the antitank gun, despite the jamming, we were hit from the left by an antitank gun shell in the engine compartment. Then the tank began to burn." <sup>79</sup>

The 9 cm antitank gun was positioned east of the church. Prahm gave orders to bail out. The radio operator was killed in machine gun fire, the driver lost a leg to an antitank gun round and Prahm was killed as well. A few Panthers were engaging the enemy infantry positions with machine gun fire, until Poetschke personally ordered other tank commanders to get the attack going again. The tanks of SS-Oberscharführer Ropeter, SS-Hauptscharführer Knappich and SS-Unterscharführer Brauschke of the 2. Kompanie attacked in an echelon right from the main street and, immediately after getting into formation, found themselves battling American antitank guns. SS-Hauptscharführer Heinz Knappich's tank "221" was hit by a antitank gun round in the differential but was able to continue with the attack. SS-Rottenführer Edi Moser's 7.5 cm gun SPW from the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was destroyed and Moser was killed. The triple-barreled Flak SPW of SS-Unterscharführer Toni Motzheim, which was moving behind and offset from Moser's SPW, likewise received a direct hit soon thereafter and burned out. Motzheim bailed out; his driver, SS-Sturmmann Leo Moser, suffered burns.

Peiper commented on the occasionally highly unusual methods with which SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke was successful in the recommendation for the Oak Leaves he submitted on 26 February 1945. At the same time, this could be seen as an example of the leadership qualities and the personal involvement of the commanders of the Waffen-SS:

The attack, which had been initiated immediately, soon came to a standstill when the road was effectively blocked by fire from four antitank/antiaircraft guns and six heavy antitank guns on the outskirts of the village as well as enemy tanks on the woods on the northern edge of Stoumont. In clear recognition of the fact that a bold advance would have success, even at the cost of materiel, Poetschke placed himself at the head of his tanks and swept them forward through his example. Despite that, the attack did not succeed and a few vehicles began to pull back slowly in order to reach the cover of the protective reverse slope of a hill. At this moment of crisis, Poetschke was gripped by a towering rage. He climbed out of his tank, grabbed a Panzerfaust and threatened to knock out his own tank crews who would roll a single step to the rear. This brutal measure was decisive. Disregarding the murderous fire and their own casualties, the tanks penetrated into the town - firing wildly - caused a great panic and broke the stiff resistance. 150 prisoners, 4 antitank/antiaircraft guns, 5 heavy antitank guns, 4 Shermans as well as a lot of war materiel and

enemy dead fell into our hands.

The fighting against the antitank guns at Stoumont lasted two hours. Werner Poetschke, one of the most colorful officers of the division, was later named in the Honor Roll of the German Army for his relentless zeal in this fighting. When American tanks and tank destroyers fled to the west, abandoning the American infantry, Peiper's men took numerous prisoners at Stoumont. The infantrymen of the US 3-119 Infantry alone lost 290 men, of which 2 were killed, 20 wounded and the rest captured. All three of their antitank guns were destroyed. Battery C of the US 143rd Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion lost its two 9 cm guns and Company A of the US 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion lost all eight tank destroyers, six half-tracks, 16 missing and nine wounded. Jochen Peiper drove up to the Robinson House at Stoumont in an American jeep captured earlier:

As there was still heavy firing on that side, I stopped at the first house on the left. An American antitank gun was located next to the house and a burning Panther. From that I concluded that it would take a while to mop up in the city. First I wanted to establish a contact point in the house. A few officers of my staff, as well as Poetschke, von Westernhagen and Nüske, came over to where I was, as did my signals officer. Then I saw an American medic standing at the house with his back against the door. As there were still a couple of American dead and wounded lying on the ground, and as the surroundings didn't seem to be especially safe, I gestured to the medic to come over and asked him a couple of questions as to whether there were still any Americans in the house or nearby houses ... Then I went to an American antiaircraft position near the house to see if these weapons were still useable.

When I returned there was such a heavy artillery barrage that I had to take cover. In this case, that meant that I jumped into the back of the house. But as the incoming rounds were very close, I came back out and lay down on the other side under the window. There I found my adjutant and a couple of men who had also taken cover. I ordered my adjutant to set up a command post at some distance from the house, as the artillery had zeroed in too well on this position. Then I climbed into his Jeep with Sturmbannführer Poetschke and drove through Stoumont.

I met Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal on the west side of the city and ordered him to immediately push on after the retiring enemy forces and, under no circumstances, was he to allow any vehicle to stop, but to press on with all speed.<sup>80</sup>

Even before 1200 hours, the tanks and Panzergrenadiere of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 had started their pursuit of the Americans retreating to the west and passed through Stoumont moving west on Route N 33. They continued on after removing mines from the road. With the Panther of SS-Oberscharführer Walter Ropeter of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in the lead, the Panzergruppe pushed through Targnon all the way to the railroad station three kilometers past Stoumont, where it ran into enemy resistance put up by 12 American tanks, four tank destroyers and an infantry battalion, all supported by two field artillery battalions. SS-Oberscharführer Walter Ropeter's Panther "225" was hit and burned out. Walter Ropeter received burns to his face and hands, and his radio operator, SS-Sturmmann Manfred Matheblowski, and his loader, SS-Sturmmann Heinz Bieler, were killed. The gunner, SS-Unterscharführer Alfred Schwaten, and the driver, SS-Rottenführer Hans Strasdin, were

badly wounded and were later taken prisoner by the Americans.<sup>81</sup> The damaged Panther "221" of the platoon leader, SS-Hauptscharführer Heinz Knappich, which was following Ropeter, was able to pick up two of the wounded men of his crew and went back to La Gleize with them.

When the trailing Panthers had passed the railroad station and approached the Zabompré farm lying just behind it to the right of the road, SS-Unterscharführer Krüger's Panther "212" and SS-Unterscharführer Brauschke's Panther "233" were destroyed. SS-Untersturmführer Hubert Kaufmann's Panther "211" stuck fast in the mud next to the road. 82 The SPW of the 11. (gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 following the Panthers suffered casualties from artillery fire. The company commander, SS-Oberscharführer Rudi Rayer, reported:

The lead vehicle was destroyed by an antitank gun next to the train station.. At that point, I received orders to take the station in dismounted attack. After overcoming slight resistance, the station fell into our hands ... In the meantime, the rest of the battalion, after clearing the knocked out tank off the road, continued the attack past the station mounted on the tanks. I was ordered to mount up the company and follow the battalion. After about one and a half to two kilometers, the company ran into heavy enemy resistance. The 11. Kompanie was assigned to eliminate the dugin enemy tanks and antitank guns in close combat by moving through the woods to the right of the road. It didn't work out and we were barely able to disengage from the enemy with heavy casualties. Then the company was used along with the rest of the battalion to provide cover to the right of the road in the woods. Shortly after there was an enemy counterattack, which we repulsed. 83

Peiper and Poetschke brought the remaining tanks and SPW back to Stoumont. As by then the fuel supply had become seriously low, Peiper at first intended to hold the line they occupied. As early as Stoumont, he had sent two reconnaissance units out to the north to see if they could find fuel dumps. One went along the road to La Reid and the other from La Gleize in the direction of Spa. He ordered the Panzer IV's back to La Gleize, with a few SPW of the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 as an escort to protect them. The Panthers of Hennecke's 1. Kompanie, which had not been a part of the attack on Stoumont, were also at La Gleize. The American prisoners were quartered and fed in Froid Cour Castle. Peiper ordered the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 to hold the area in and around Stoumont where, along with five Panthers, there were the two SPW platoons of the 3./SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1, paratroopers and a "Wirbelwind" armored Flak. The III. (gep.)/2. SS-Panzer Grenadier Battalion occupied defensive positions at Stoumont and Cheneux. Flak-Bataillon 84 covered the crossing over the Amel at Cheneux.

SS-Oberscharführer Rayer's 11. (gep.) Kompanie moved from the Stoumont railroad station to Cheneux in the evening and was given the mission to hold Cheneux. "There was continuous heavy enemy fire while moving to that village. After I had given directions to the company, I myself was wounded on my way to the company command post. I was taken to Stoumont Castle in an SPW. There I was placed in a cellar where I lay among wounded American soldiers." <sup>84</sup>

La Gleize was covered to the north and northeast by six Tigers from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, among other elements. A few tanks carried out a reconnaissance up to Borgoumont, but

encountered no enemy forces. There were six Panzer IV's, the Panthers of the 1. Kompanie, and SS-Hauptscharführer Knappich's Panther from the 2. Kompanie, as well as an SPW element from the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 at La Gleize.

Jochen Peiper set up his command post in the estate house at Froid Cour Castle, half way between La Gleize and Stoumont along Route N 33. The main aid station and the prisoner collection point were both in the castle itself. The commander of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke, who was responsible for the defense of Stoumont, occupied an isolated forest house above the estate house.85 Toward 1500 hours SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser met SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke on the road to Stoumont at the junction with the road to Froid Cour and moved together with him to La Gleize. On the main road, they met Peiper and SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Gruhle, who was once more with Peiper as his adjutant. Together they discussed the situation at Stoumont and the fuel shortage problem. More scouting parties were to be sent out to look for American fuel dumps. Following the conference, SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke traveled back to Stoumont with Reiser. Reiser became Poetschke's adjutant in place of the wounded SS-Untersturmführer Kramm and SS-Untersturmführer Steininger became the orderly officer.86

At the beginning of the evening the Americans felt their way forward again west of Stoumont, some of them with some tank support. Because of the three-kilometer long flank up to the Stoumont railroad station, Peiper pulled back the forces holding it to the bend in the road and then, after 2100 hours, back to the edge of the village of Stoumont.<sup>87</sup> The five Panthers covered the exit roads from Stoumont to the west and north, while the two SPW platoons of SS-Untersturmführer Seitz and SS-Oberscharführer Beutner of the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 were located in the St. Edward Sanitarium on a hill north of N 33 and in the northwestern platoon of Stoumont. The SPW-Bataillon's 9. and 12. (s. gep.) Kompanien had taken up positions in the middle and the western part of Stoumont, and Preuß' 10. (gep.) Kompanie was placed in reserve near Froid Cour Castle.

Starting in the early morning of 20 December 1944, Peiper's Kampfgruppe was attacked on all sides from Stoumont to La Gleize. The villages lay under heavy artillery fire which lasted the entire day. Massed American tank attacks were repulsed at Stoumont. On the western outskirts of the village, it came down to stubborn fighting for individual houses. The enemy attacks were also repelled to the north of Stoumont. At Cheneux, the artillery men of Flak-Bataillon 84 and the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 held their own in fierce close quarters combat against the US 82nd Airborne Division. The II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Hauptsturmführer Schnelle managed to break through to la Gleize, whereupon the 6. Kompanie under SS-Obersturmführer Schenk was sent to support the Panzergrenadiere at Cheneux.88 The 5. Artillerie-Batterie also fought at Cheneux. The King Tigers of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 in la Gleize reported that American tanks were assembling east of Roanne.

Around noon, some 40 tanks advanced past La Gleize to the Roanne – Trois-Ponts road and cut the road leading from La Gleize to Trois-Ponts. Because they had almost run out of fuel, and because ammunition was getting short, Peiper was unable to

launch a counterattack against the tanks. As his Panzergruppe was surrounded, the division wanted to supply it from the air. Peiper was out of contact with it. "Radio contact was also wretched. Although we periodically transmitted our radio messages, we received no confirmation." 89

The Americans continued uninterrupted attacks on Cheneux and Stoumont but they were all beaten back in stubborn close combat by the resolute Panzergrenadiere of the SPW-Bataillon. An enemy tank which broke through into Stoumont from the north in the afternoon was destroyed by SS-Unterscharführer Karl-Heinz Hagestedt of the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 with a Panzerfaust. The tank burned out. The St. Edward Sanitarium on the northwest edge of the village was a critical point for the defense of Stoumont. The 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 under SS-Untersturmführer Franz Sievers, with elements of the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and some paratroopers of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9, were employed there. Sievers was assigned to hold the northwest and south edges of Stoumont; five tanks were assigned to him. A few days later, Peiper described Sievers' battle in Stoumont:

Against overwhelming American infantry strength attacking with tank support, Sievers, with three men left, was forced back into a room in the sanitarium. With Panzerfaust and hand grenades, he fought his way from room to room clearing out the Americans who had gotten in, and with his pistol held off the infantry in the cellar. After a tank had been called up and swept the second floor clear with its cannon and machine gun, he was the first to push into the cellar and destroy the enemy in close combat. The Americans repeated their attack twice, and each time they managed to push into the sanitarium because of their numerical superiority. It is only thanks to SS-Obersturmführer Sievers' fanatical will to resist, coupled with his outstanding leadership ability and superhuman courage, that the sanitarium remained in our hands. This also guaranteed freedom of movement for the entire Panzergruppe, which had already been compressed into a narrow area.92

SS-Obersturmführer Sievers himself wrote about it: "The sanitarium was only given up for half a night and, in the counterattack, we took 40 to 50 prisoners and destroyed three tanks. The prisoners were taken to La Gleize. Stoumont was held until we were ordered to withdraw."<sup>93</sup>

In the afternoon the leader of the 2nd platoon in Sievers' Company, SS-Oberscharführer Max Beutner, was killed in action. SS-Obersturmführer Franz Sievers, who had already been recommended for the Nahkampfspange in Gold, was mentioned in the Honor Roll of the Germany Army for his performance at Stoumont. He received the Honor Roll Clasp. Toward evening, enemy artillery fire concentrated on Stoumont and Cheneux. In some instances the enemy assaults on the Amel bridge in Cheneux could only be halted by putting the last man available into battle. During the night the situation in Stoumont became increasingly critical.44 Sievers' armored engineers took back the sanitarium during the night in close combat, in which they took 40 prisoners including three officers. SS-Untersturmführer August Seitz, the leader of Sievers' 1st Platoon, was killed during the night. La Gleize was already under artillery fire and the tank crews there scarcely dared to leave their tanks.95

On 21 December 1944 the enemy resumed his mass attacks. The Kampfgruppe of the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 under

SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Hansen was intended to break through to Peiper from the Wanne area by way of Trois-Ponts and Coo. Peiper learned of this from one of the few radio messages which reached the Panzergruppe. The first American attack on Cheneux was carried out to 0300 hours in the night, but it was halted by the German defense. A German counterattack on the hills to the west from the center of the village was smashed. Further American attacks were repulsed by the Panzergrenadiere and the Flak artillery men. At 1700 hours the defenders pulled back from Cheneux to La Gleize. Fourteen Flak guns, five 10.5 cm guns, two 7.5 cm antitank guns, six SPW and four trucks remained behind in Cheneux without fuel. SS-Obersturmführer Rumpf's Engineers from the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and a few tank crews beat back a tank attack at Borgoumont, north of La Gleize. Rumpf's armored engineers, along with a Tiger from the 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, a Panther and four Panzer IV's of the 6. Kompanie were also in position above La Gleize at Hassoumont and Les Montis. The commander of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Benoni Junker, was wounded.95a

In the morning SS-Hauptsturmführer Klingelhöfer's command tank of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and SS-Untersturmführer Hantusch's Tiger from the 2./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 moved from the Marechal Mill on the road running from La Gleize to Trois-Ponts and took up positions at the Werimont farm to the south east. The commander of Flak Battalion 84 was also located there, as well as SS-Obersturmführer Dollinger's Tiger from the 2./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, SS-Unterscharführer Friedrichs' Panther from the 1. Kompanie, and another Panther and a few SPW. Klingelhöfer's driver recalled:

A little beet sugar and a few frozen apples from the upper parts of the farm were all we had to eat for several days, although my crew still had a bread crust. The company commander and I, however, didn't ask for any, as there wasn't enough for everyone. It was the same with sleep. You couldn't even think about it ... For all of us, whether commander or simple soldier, it was the same thing – we had exceeded the limits of endurance long ago. The faces were hollow, unshaven and unwashed; our eyes were inflamed and everyone had a cold. Many of the men were wounded. Their condition was horrible and everyone knew that the worst was yet to come ... The drive for survival had never been stronger than in these hardest and most hopeless days of my life.%

Around noon Peiper called the commanders of the Panzergruppe, Poetschke, Diefenthal and von Westernhagen, to his command post in Froid Cour, where the situation in the pocket was discussed in detail. Since it was senseless to continue to try to hold Stoumont and Cheneux with the forces available, Peiper had decided to pull back his positions back to La Gleize in the evening. While on the way from La Gleize to Stoumont on a motorcycle with sidecar, the commander of the 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Birnschein, was wounded in the lower jaw and both legs by rifle bullets before reaching the village.97 At Stoumont tank commander and headquarters section leader SS-Unterscharführer Walter Wrabetz and SS-Oberscharführer Hubert Huber of the 6. Kompanie were severely wounded and SS-Unterscharführer Heinz Nagel of the 1. Kompanie was killed.98 After 1400 hours the American task force of the 2-119 Infantry under Major McCown blocked the road running from La Gleize to Stoumont by cutting down trees across the

road and laying mines under them. Soon after that, McCown unexpectedly encountered the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Obersturmführer Preuß at Froid Cour Castle and was taken prisoner.<sup>99</sup> The tank obstacle was cleared by a squad from the 12. (schwere gep.) Kompanie.<sup>100</sup> The severity of the fighting in Stoumont was reflected in the number of casualties taken by the 1-119 Infantry: 22 killed, 94 wounded and 81 missing.<sup>101</sup>

# Panzergruppe Peiper at La Gleize: 21 to 23 December 1944

The withdrawal of the German front took place in the early evening of 21 December without enemy contact. Instead of on the Meuse, Panzergruppe Peiper was squeezed into a very narrow area, in a Wallonian mountain village with less than 30 houses. In the afternoon Jochen Peiper set up his new command post in Madam Boulanger's farm house in the middle of La Gleize, and SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke set up in the school. In the late afternoon all of the German walking wounded of the approximately 120 German and American wounded at the aid station at Froid Cour Castle were brought to La Gleize. Of the 130 American prisoners, all non-wounded ones were also brought to La Gleize. Some 80 German wounded and all the American wounded remained back in the castle under the care of a German medical noncommissioned officer, two American corpsmen and two Belgian women. According to testimony by American corpsman Everett Smith, Peiper arrived at the castle and described the situation to him.2 German doctors cared for all the wounded for the last time and in the afternoon of the following day they were already being evacuated by the Americans.3 All of the units of Panzergruppe Peiper had withdrawn from Cheneux and Stoumont by midnight on 21 December 1944 at the latest and were concentrated at La Gleize. All of the Panzer IV's, Panthers, Tigers, SPW and infantry guns took up all-round defensive positions at La Gleize.

The 13. (IG)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under Obersturmführer Koch had all six 10.5 cm infantry guns in position, and there was also a "Grille" from this company (gun commander SS-Unterscharführer Hermann Tiedemann) with them at La Gleize. <sup>4</sup> SS-Hauptscharführer Heinz Knappich of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 had been in position in the northeast section of La Gleize since 19 December 1944. His Panther "221" (driver Werner, radio operator Mikolaschek, gunner Heinz Hofmann and loader Kübler) was located in a farm yard where SS-Unterscharführer Drechsler from the 1. Kompanie had already taken position with his Panther. SS-Rottenführer Heinz Hofmann recalled:

December 21 passed under heavy artillery fire, since the enemy had probably detected our mortars which had been set up in the farm across from us. We were inside the tank day and night. First of all, that gave us the best protection against the artillery fire and, second, we were an outpost, so we had to be ready to go at any minute. I still remember clearly that we used empty lemonade bottles for urinals as we didn't want to expose ourselves to fire unnecessarily ... we wrapped ourselves in blankets inside the tank, as it was fairly cold at that time.<sup>5</sup>

On 22 December 1944 the Americans placed the German positions at La Gleize and its surrounding area under continuous

artillery fire. The bombardment, which lasted all night, increased in intensity as the foggy morning dawned. It was raining mixed with snow. The Americans set the houses on fire with phosphorous and an artificial layer of fog covered La Gleize. At 1400 hours the Americans made a concentric attack on La Gleize from both sides along every road leading into the village. SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke's adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser, recalled:

After a halfway peaceful night - the enemy hadn't attacked and we had since long grown accustomed to the continuous artillery fire - there was an increasingly heavy bombardment during the morning. Contact with the commanders in the defensive positions was only possible by runner. The runners accomplished incredible things that day, under murderous artillery fire and in direct view of the enemy. At 1400 hours the American artillery ceased fire and launched a concentrated attack along every road leading in with tanks and infantry. All hell had broken loose! Obersturmbannführer Peiper ordered: "Everyone out to help the defense!" We left the command post. Tank crews, runners and radiomen, armed with rifles, submachine guns and Panzerfäuste took up positions in the ruined houses and waited for the enemy. A sniper knelt next to me in the corner a broken house wall and played "target gallery" with the American infantrymen approaching in the road ditches. Because of their numerical superiority in tanks, the Americans managed to push up to the first houses along the roads from Stoumont and Borgoumont. In the process of counterattacking, and in the fierce house-to-house fighting which lasted for hours, we were once more able to repel all the attacks. The enemy halted his attack as the light faded and pulled back. Prisoners and wounded from both sides were assembled in the few overcrowded cellars and given first aid.7

Tiger "334" of the 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 was able to eliminate a Sherman before it too was put out of action. SS-Hauptsturmführer Möbius, firing from a garden, destroyed a US tank at 2400 meters with his second shot.8 Not only did the Americans systematically set the houses in La Gleize on fire with phosphorous rounds, but their antitank guns and tanks also fired directly at the church which was displaying the Red Cross, collapsing the tower. An SPW triple-barreled Flak of the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 shot down an artillery observation plane.9 SS-Rottenführer Heinz Hofmann wrote:

On 22 December 1944, the artillery fire increased enormously. Breaks in the firing occurred, but not in anyway where you could determine when they would be ... The civilians across from us left their houses to take cover in the dugouts. Anyone who didn't absolutely have to be outside, took cover from the artillery bombardment. Midday, towards 1400 hours, the bombardment increased tremendously. After two hours most of the houses in our part of the village were in ruins, especially the upper floors and the gables. At the time the bombardment began, we, that is different men from both crews, were in the cellar of our farm house. At the time, Obersturmführer Preuß' command post was also in the cellar. 10

Preuß' SPW, which was parked in a garden near the farm, burned out after a direct hit. Because of the artillery preparation, SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke suspected an American attack on La Gleize from the north. He ordered SS-Untersturmführer Hennecke and SS-Hauptscharführer Pidun of the 1. Panzer-

Kompanie to go up to where the road branched off to Spa, where SS-Unterscharführer Daniel Mayer's Panther was in a defensive position, to reconnoiter the situation. They ran into the artillery fire while under way and Hennecke sent Pidun back to Poetschke with the report that the enemy was attacking. When the Americans then attacked from the northeast, SS-Oberscharführer Adolf Thomas ran to the farm where Knappich's tank was located and alerted him. Knappich's gunner wrote:

We immediately climbed into our tank and, even before the engine had properly warmed up, we headed down the village street toward the church. After 100 meters we turned left onto a meadow. There was a valley in front of us but we couldn't see anything as the enemy had covered his attack with smoke. Unterscharführer Richartz' tank of the 1. Kompanie was next to us on the meadow about 30 meters away. We could only shoot blindly in the direction of the enemy. After about an hour it became too dangerous. The attack was repulsed but their artillery was firing a heavy bombardment.<sup>11</sup>

Poetschke's signals officer, SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Buchheim, was wounded, as were SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Kramm (again) and SS-Standartenoberjunker Siegfried Haneberg.<sup>12</sup> Kramm was to see the men of the Panzer regiment in 1946 under very different circumstances. SS-Rottenführer Rolf Ehrhardt, driver of the company commander's tank in the 7. Kompanie, reported the following from the perspective of the Werimont Farm:

A number of American Shermans were moving along the road opposite us. The gun on our Panzer IV was of little use because of the extreme range. The much longer 8.8 cm guns of the two King Tigers and the 7.5 cm guns of the Panthers would have had an easy time with these Shermans, which were certainly outranged at those distances. Was it a desire for revenge? But there was also the desire to finally see some victories of our own. The American unit had been detected early enough and we waited until they were good targets. Then the fire fight began. After the first round from a Tiger missed, the Shermans unexpectedly wheeled to face us and opened up with rapid fire. This drove me out of my observation post on the second floor to rapidly take cover in the cellar. There we could follow the fighting by ear.

The American shells howled through the house. The cellar was overcrowded with people, waiting for a break in the firing to count the number of Shermans destroyed. Pieces of stone and chalk rained down from the ceiling. The firing of our Tigers' super guns could be clearly distinguished from the explosions of the enemy rounds. Each round fired from an 88 was a hit in our minds. Suddenly Tiger Commander Hantusch burst into the cellar with both hands pressed to his head, and yelled: "That was Hantusch's last stand!" His Tiger had been hit several times, which so jolted the sensitive weapons system that the electrical firing system broke down. Then a hit on the turret had lightly wounded Hantusch in the head, and he was forced to abandon the smoking tank which could have burst into flames at any moment.

Minutes later, the second Tiger commander, Obersturmführer Dollinger, arrived speechless in the cellar, bleeding heavily from the head. After he had been bandaged, he reported that the smoke from his gun had made it impossible to fire and adjust, and the enemy's immediate response had taken away any last chance to hit them. The numerical superiority of the eight to ten Shermans and their continuous rapid fire had more than compensated for

the superior weapons on our tanks. Dollinger's Tiger had then been hit once more by a round which amputated the front third of his gun. We were all thoroughly depressed and realized that in this god-forsaken place, everything had turned around against us. Our highest trump card hadn't worked, here where it had been so bitterly necessary.<sup>13</sup>

Dollinger's Tiger "213", with the gun replaced, remains on display at La Gleize to this day.

Towards 2000 hours three German supply planes dropped supply containers, but only 10% of them could be recovered by Peiper's emaciated men while the rest landed in no-man's-land or in the hands of the Americans.<sup>14</sup> Although a few men fired flares vertically into the air, the drop over the narrow area was unsuccessful. 15 In his cellar that day, SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper continued to calmly issue orders to his officers and men. He had no sleep. He knew that the objective, the Meuse, had receded into the background. His thoughts on this depressing subject mostly arose at night, when it was somewhat quieter, at least for a little while. In any case, he kept these thoughts to himself. With iron discipline, Jochen Peiper kept a grip on himself, and every man who was with him in that cellar at La Gleize during these hopeless winter days found moral support in their commander and followed the example that he and his behavior set for them. Such leaders, who not only shared all the burdens and disappointments of their men, but who could continue to set an example for them in these difficult situations, are leaders who can be sure of the hearts of their men. Concern for his soldiers moved Peiper, who often visited the wounded lying in the cellars. 6 SS-Rottenführer Rolf Ehrhardt, driver of the command tank for the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, described his experiences in Peiper's cellar:

During those days before 23 December I had to go to Peiper's command post some 20 to 30 times ... Peiper's command post was in a house to the right of the street not far from the church and, looking north out its back windows, you could probably see the villages of Roanne and Borgoumont. The vaulted cellar had been constructed in the native stone as usual and was not very roomy. It's main characteristic was a large table built from a stone slab as thick as your fist. Obersturmbannführer Peiper stayed in this room when he wasn't with his men somewhere else.

In the final days of the fighting at La Gleize I was often in this cellar and escorted Hauptsturmführer Klingelhöfer where I served as a "spectator" to the conference or, even more frequently, as a runner to bring reports or pick up orders. The radio post was set up in the cellar of a house on the way to the Werimont Farm. There was only a field telephone installed in the command post. When they began to use this cellar, at Peiper's wish, I installed a small cast-iron stove. In spite of the improvised outlet fashioned out of several stove pipe sections leading through the tiny cellar window, it worked beautifully.

Peiper thanked me and took this opportunity to ask about my future plans. I said, "Maybe TFO." Naturally, this was a joke. In the unit the engineering officer, who was the maintenance officer, was called the TFK – Technischer Führer für das Kraftfahrwesen (Technical officer for Vehicle Matters). Peiper laughed heartily at my version – TFO, the "O" standing for oven.

... There was a lot of activity in the command post. Runners and officers came and went almost continuously. The faces were not only marked with exhaustion, but were also very serious and

hard. Obersturmbannführer Peiper was calmness itself. You hardly ever saw any sign of emotion. When he received a report of the death of an infantry officer who was close to him, I saw his face from close-up. His mouth became tighter, insofar as that was still possible. His eyes became slits and he clenched his fists, as if he wanted to break something – but only for a second. Then the tension vanished, and he was as he always was. He asked technical questions and issued orders. He didn't swear and he didn't raise his voice. That was Peiper, who during this hopeless phase of the fighting at La Gleize, as during his entire career, gave even the least of his men a degree of support and security that few officers in the unit could.

I also met another person in this cellar. I was accidentally present when the American Major McCown, staff officer for the US 30th Infantry Division, was brought into the command post as a prisoner by Oberscharführer Max Bergmann. The tall officer had to stand bent over in the door jamb as he presented himself with a casual salute. Peiper arose from the table and extended his hand to McCown. I understood nothing of the conversation which followed.<sup>17</sup>

Concerning his conversation with McCown, Peiper wrote:

We spoke little of ideologies, but more about the tragedy and stupidity that people like us had to fight each other. In this particular case, I managed to convince McCown that we were still in control of the situation and that we had just now been pulled back. He smiled and said: "OK, colonel, I've always wanted to ride in a King Tiger!" He didn't know that he would have to go on foot.<sup>18</sup>

Major Hal McCown remembered the days in which he met with Peiper as a prisoner:

During the night of 21 December, at about 2300 hours, I was taken once more to Colonel Peiper's command post in the cellar. I found him in a very different mood in contrast to his previous cold, impersonal bearing. He and I talked from 2300 hours until 0500 hours the following morning. Our topic was mainly his defense of national socialism and Germany's reason for fighting. I have met few men who have so impressed me in such a short time as this officer did. He was maybe 1.75 meters tall, weighed about 135 pounds, had long, black hair combed straight back, well cut facial features with a remarkable similarity to those of the actor Ray Milland.

He was totally convinced of Germany's ability to beat the Allies. He spoke of Himmler's new replacement army and explained in detail that it would contain so many new divisions, Panzer divisions as well as others, that our field intelligence officers would wonder where they came from. He did his best to find out from me what kind of success the V-1's and V-2's were having and stated to me that they would launch more secret weapons like those. He stated that a new U-boat offensive had been launched and that they knew a significant tonnage had been sunk in the English Channel as a result of this offensive. The German Luftwaffe would shortly be in the air with entirely new types of aircraft which, although in fewer numbers than the Allies, would be superior technically, and there would be enough to protect the German breakthrough in Belgium and Holland and cover them to the French coast as well.<sup>19</sup>

While radio transmissions from the Panzergruppe at La Gleize to the division remained unanswered, Peiper remembered that a radio message received from the division read: "Six combat-ready King Tigers at the entrance to Stavelot. Where shall we send them?" My answer was: "To La Gleize, by air!" SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 under SS-Obersturmbannführer Max

Hansen moved out to relieve Panzergruppe Peiper on the morning of this day and its III. Bataillon reached Petit Coo. The advance of both of its assault battalions, which were without heavy weapons support, bogged down in the face of a vigorous American defense. In one of the last radio messages to arrive at La Gleize, Hansen's failure was reported to Peiper. Jochen Peiper was a realist and it was clear to him that after that attempt at relief had failed, his Panzergruppe was on its own. As the surrounded Panzergruppe had received no rations, munitions or fuel, it was practically immobile and would soon be defenseless. Peiper was stuck, "like a mouse in a trap," as SS-Obersturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen, who was also present at La Gleize, rather drastically but accurately put it.<sup>21</sup>

Peiper knew that because of shortages of fuel and munitions, his exhausted unit wouldn't be able to maintain its resistance against the on-rushing Americans for very long. For the first time Peiper mentioned the possibility of a breakout in a conference with commanders Poetschke, Diefenthal, and von Westernhagen. He notified division of this proposal by radio and requested permission for a breakout. There has been a lot of discussion in the literature concerning the missing or poor radio contact between the Panzergruppe at La Gleize and the division, some of it erroneous. The SPW with the Panzer regiment's main network control station was at La Gleize and was located in a barn, while the crew took cover in the cellar of the farm house. In a house next to it there was a radio station which had been dispatched by the division and which had contact with it. Along with these, there was yet another SPW at La Gleize with a radio installation belonging to the signals battalion with two radio section leaders, SS-Oberscharführer Diener and SS-Unterscharführer Dietrich.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time the units of SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 and SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 fighting at Stavelot had to repel strong American attacks. Among others, the cannon platoon of SS-Oberscharführer Helmut Feldvoß of the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was there. It was intended to act as a reserve and provide security for the logistics elements.<sup>23</sup> The 3. platoon (SS-Untersturmführer Kämpfe) and the bridging platoon (SS-Oberscharführer Kern) of the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 were also there. On the morning of 23 December 1944 there were no attacks on La Gleize. The Americans were again firing phosphorous rounds into the rubble. Peiper's tanks had no more gasoline and the ammunition for the tanks had been expended. Since the beginning of the offensive the Panzergruppe hadn't once received rations. A radio operator from the Panzer regiment's main radio installation described the men's condition:

At La Gleize, morale was very muted, almost fatalistic. Naturally, we didn't let our heads hang. But there, for the first and only time in combat, I had the feeling that I wasn't going to get out. From the military radio station in Calais I had heard that the Leibstandarte had been surrounded at La Gleize and was awaiting annihilation there. I myself had my boot torn by a shell splinter right behind the Achilles tendon while replacing the antenna leads for the divisional radio post. Airborne supply wasn't working. As a result, there was almost no fuel or ammunition left. Morale was down to zero. The order to break out brought a sigh of relief – to those who could still walk – we started to show initiative again.<sup>24</sup>

Jochen Peiper stated:

On the morning of 23 December, another report came in "Can you break out with all your vehicles and wounded?" My answer: "Last chance for breakout this evening without wounded or vehicles. Please approve." Convinced that I would receive permission to break out during he course of the day, I immediately began to

make the necessary preparations and put together a plan. While my radio officer was busy trying to reestablish radio contact, he continuously asked:

"Where is the main line of resistance? Where is the artillery support? May we break out?"

During the afternoon, our preparations for breaking out had advanced to the point where there was no turning back. On tiptoe, I waited for the message to let us go, which would approve this upcoming action. Towards 1700 hours, we received the following message: "Specify when and where you will cross our lines with all vehicles and wounded." <sup>25</sup>

In the early evening, the division acceded to Peiper's request.<sup>26</sup>

Peiper had worked hard on preparing the breakout of his Kampfgruppe. The wounded and prisoners in the cellars, as well as the tanks and equipment, had to be left behind. Peiper came to an agreement with the captured American officers, according to which they would take over command of the prisoners and wounded of both nations who remained behind after the Kampfgruppe broke out. Peiper, Major McCown and Captain Crissinger signed this paper. McCown would accompany the breakout. The battalion surgeon of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Willibald Dittmann, and the medic for the Panzer regiment's Headquarters Company, SS-Unterscharführer Rolf Fricke, volunteered to stay behind to ensure medical care for the wounded Germans and Americans remaining at La Gleize.

At the final orders briefing during the evening hours of 23 December 1944 all of the commanders were assembled at Poetschke's command post: Peiper, SS-Obersturmbannführer von Westernhagen, SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke, SS-Hauptsturmführer Diefenthal, as well as other commanders and adjutants. Peiper listened to the opinions of his officers and then afterwards issued them his orders for the breakout. At 0200 hours on 24 December 1944 the breakout was to be carried out to the south along the Basse-Bodeux and Trois-Ponts roads. The password was appropriately "Merry Christmas." The last radio message which Peiper sent to division had the sarcastic content typical of him: "I am heading southeast through the woods with smoking socks." <sup>27</sup>

That afternoon the Americans launched another attack on La Gleize with tanks with infantry mounted on them and were able to push into the northeast corner of the village. However, they were pushed back by the Panzergrenadiere in close combat. Some tanks were destroyed with close range weapons. Peiper's men were able to eliminate a total of six American tanks in close combat. SS-Unterscharführer Karl Übler, who commanded the cannon section of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was one of the men at La Gleize who fought tirelessly. With his two 7.5 cm cannon SPW he continuously fought at La Gleize against the penetration points of the Americans. He had been wounded several times already, but the 23-year-old soldier from Franconia was unshaken and stayed with his cannon section. Peiper recommended him for inclusion in the Honor Roll of the German Army. Section 2.

"Since 20 December 1944 up to 14 repeated attacks by the American 3rd Armored Division and 30th Infantry Division were repelled." wrote SS-Oberführer Mohnke concerning the fighters at La Gleize. SS-Sturmmann Fritz Eckmann, radio operator in the 1. Panzer-Kompanie, wrote: "At La Gleize our tanks were scattered all over. Our tanks were on a hill to the right. We were

continuously on alert and I had to go to the command post twice daily to pass on reports. On the 23rd I received the message: "Destroy the tank and in the evening get out of the pocket. The radio operator must take his radio with him." <sup>31</sup>

It is interesting to pass on the impressions which Major Hal McCown gained of Peiper's men during those days at La Gleize:

For me, it was very surprising to see how young the men of this unit were. Most of the men were 18 or 19 years old, recently enlisted but, as far as I could tell, thoroughly trained. There were some who had fought in Russia among the men as well as the noncommissioned officers. The officers were generally experienced but also very young. The ages of the captains and lieutenants ranged from 19 to 27 years old. During the period that I was with them, morale was high in spite of the extremely difficult situation. Discipline was very good. The physical condition of the personnel was good, except for the shortage of adequate rations ... The relations between officers and men, especially with the commanding officer, Colonel Peiper, were closer and friendlier than I had expected ... With regard to the treatment of prisoners by the SS, I can say that the prisoners were at no time poorly treated by this organization. The food was very limited, but it was almost as good as that which the Germans themselves received. The American prisoners were always sheltered in cellars, in order to protect them from the extraordinarily heavy American artillery bombardment.32

#### Breakout from La Gleize: 24 to 25 December 1944

In many cases the data in the available literature is contradictory as to whether the tanks, SPW and vehicles were blown up or not. According to the testimony of many of those who broke out of La Gleize, vehicles were demolished. In other cases, however, only the weapons and engines were rendered useless. A few men had remained behind at La Gleize for a short time after the breakout to carry out demolitions, e.g., the radio operator for the Panzer regiment's main radio net control station, SS-Unterscharführer Hans Hillig, who had earlier been a combat engineer. He blew up his radio post. <sup>1</sup> A total of 6 Panzer IV's, 13 Panthers, six Tigers, 45 to 60 SPW, the 6 10.5cm infantry guns, one "Grille", 3 "Pumas", 4 2 cm Flak, 4 12 cm mortars, and several other vehicles were destroyed and left behind at La Gleize.

At 0200 hours on 24 December 1944 every man in Panzergruppe Peiper who could walk, including the wounded, assembled to begin the breakout to freedom. One element, however, had already set out earlier, as SS-Rottenführer Hermann Stariz of the 13. (IG)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 remembered:

I was a runner. We received orders to break out between 1700 and 1800 hours (author: 24 December 1944). At 1800 the first ones started out, always only two to four men at long intervals. We assembled up on the mountain. The drivers or those detailed to demolition work stayed behind. The GI's were continuously shooting into La Gleize. When we were then all on the mountain—it was already after midnight—the demolitions began. When the last of our demolitions had gone off we began to march, single file.<sup>2</sup>

The group was able to withdraw from La Gleize to the south to the viaduct. It crossed the Amel on a wooden bridge and pushed into the woods of Stalons. The men reached the heights of Brume through the deep snow. Deployed scouts reported to Peiper at about 1000 hours that Brume was occupied by the enemy. As a result, he was forced to march to the northeast to get to the bend in the Amel at Grand Coo. From there the group swung to the west, marched past Beaulou and went around Brume to the west continuing its march to the south. The march of the 800 men under Peiper was like that of a legend. SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper had distributed his officers along the long column of his men. During the halts in the march, when everyone, exhausted and to a certain extent apathetic, took advantage of these rest stops, Peiper went from group to group, cheered up his men, encouraged them and infused them with new hope and confidence.

It seems completely inexplicable where this man got his physical strength. He had stricken the word sleep from his vocabulary since the beginning of the offensive. He even carried on a conversation with Major McCown, whom they had taken with them.<sup>3</sup> "While we climbed the steep slopes," Hal McCown said, "I saw him speak a few encouraging words and give the heavily loaded men encouraging slaps on the back."<sup>4</sup>

On the morning of 24 December 1944 the Americans attacked La Gleize again, until they realized that there was no enemy opposing them. They soon found the American and German wounded, who were formally turned over to them by SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Dittmann. According to Captain Strand's testimony, the battalion commander of the 1-119 Infantry had the captured Germans march onto the village square, where they had to take off the shoes and trousers of American origin and stand out in the ice cold and snow without shoes or trousers.<sup>5</sup>

"Christmas Eve 1944 ... I was wounded ... examined by the Americans, operated on, patched up, and called back to life with many containers of blood" wrote the commander of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Benoni Junker, who was captured, as was SS-Untersturmführer Kramm. The other wounded officers went along on the breakout. Peiper's group went through the Bois de Troibaileu to reach Henri Moulin at about 1700 hours. After a rest halt, they continued on in the dark. SS-Rottenführer Hermann Staritz:

While we were on the march, Peiper occasionally went down the line to the men, encouraging them. We moved, all 800 men, in single file and I had an MG 42 to carry, as we had brought all the crew-served weapons with us. Otherwise, we were only able to take the most necessary items. When he came up to me he said: "It gets heavier after a while. When you can't carry it any more, give it to someone else." I said, "I'll manage." And I did it, too. I didn't freeze because I worked up a good sweat going uphill, and it was up and down all the time. I would have done anything for Peiper, he was such a great example. Whenever we were in a bad spot – and I was really afraid – he always got us out of danger."

Peiper knew that during the day the Americans would realize that the defenders of La Gleize had disappeared. When, at 2000 hours, the first men of the march column ran into an American tank post in front of route N 23 (Trois-Ponts – Basse-Bodeux), the men threw themselves into close combat with the infantry. Because of the exhaustion of a few grenadiers, the marching column separated during this encounter. The rumor was passed on that Peiper had gone up ahead and that they had lost contact with him.<sup>8</sup> They continued on through the snow-covered woods, on steep slopes which robbed the tired men of their last strength.

Peiper had noticed the loss of part of the column and left a few men back in the woods to wait for the stragglers in order to show them the direction to the Salm and to Wanne.<sup>9</sup>

After the wooded slopes of Mont de Fosse, the group ran into an American outpost at St. Jacques on the forest road southwest of Bergeval, which was also overpowered in close combat. Major McCown, who was supposed to have been released after Peiper reached friendly troops and the wounded were returned to the Germans, evaded his guard, SS-Rottenführer Paul Froehlich, and escaped. There will be more to say about him later. Thirst plagued the men who, in spite of the cold, were soaked with sweat and frequently ate icicles or a hand-full of snow to combat it.10 Soon they arrived at the American lines in the Valley of the Salm. Peiper's men broke through it from the rear. However, there was yet another hurdle for the totally exhausted men: the Salm. Its crossing would normally constitute no problem, however, the large amounts of snow and slush had swollen the stream and at many points it was no longer or only barely passable on foot.

The men of Panzergruppe Peiper reached the Salm at dawn. A few groups found places where a person could still wade straight across on foot, and stones were lined up next to each other for the crossing. SS-Rottenführer Staritz wrote:

On the first day of Christmas – it was already light – we reached the Salm. We had to go through it, since the Americans were at the bridge waiting for us. The water was ice cold, in some places up to your chest. I had my MG on my shoulder and was holding the man in front of me by his jacket. That way each man had a hold on the next. As we emerged, all our belongings had frozen stiff, and then came the way – almost an hour – uphill to Wanne. 11

In the meantime, the Americans had discovered where Peiper's escaping men were and shelled them with heavy artillery as they crossed the Salm. SS-Obersturmbannführer von Westernhagen personally carried along a wounded man and, as he wrote shortly after the event, crossed "... a raging torrent under rattling machine gun fire ...". While swimming across the Salm, a panic-stricken man who couldn't swim held tightly to Peiper's leg. Peiper was lightly wounded by a bullet through the hand. 13

The particularly tight comradeship of the Waffen-SS was very apparent during the crossing of the Salm. SS-Unterscharführer Erich Straßgschwandtner carried the headquarters section leader of the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Unterscharführer Rudi Voigt, through the Salm, as he has symptoms of paralysis in his left arm which had always been only capable of limited movement.14 Peiper's orderly officer, SS-Obersturmführer Rudi Mäule, was hit by shrapnel while climbing a slope about 10 meters away from SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser and died in the hospital that same day.15 Poetschke's wounded signals officer, SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Buchheim, slipped off a rock into the Salm and was pulled out by his driver, SS-Rottenführer Reinhard Maier. In the woods, within sight of Wanne, he was wounded by shrapnel from a round bursting in a tree.16 SS-Untersturmführer Max Leike, the veteran commander of the 9. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was wounded and succumbed to of his wounds on 23 January 1945 in Niederprüm in the Eifel Mountains.

After the Salm, the steep slope of the Bois des Echvins had to be climbed and, after that, the men of the Panzergruppe reached the lines held by SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 after a 33 hour march. On the morning of 25 December 1944 Jochen Peiper reported in to SS-Oberführer Mohnke at the divisional command post in Wanne Castle. After submitting his initial report, he had a warm meal with SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke, his first since the beginning of the offensive. Out of the nearly 3000 men of Panzergruppe Peiper, some 800 made it back to their own lines. The totally exhausted, frozen and soaked men were taken into the quarters of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 by their comrades and taken care of as best they could. Looking back, Jochen Peiper said: "During the entire offensive, my people and I ate very little, slept even less, and had no opportunity at all to shave. I dare say that I went for nine days without any real sleep and that anyone who brought along a second uniform would have been punished." 18

In spite of the unfortunate result of the offensive, morale was high among the men and SS-Obersturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen wrote shortly after the breakout:

For five days we sat there without rations and with little ammunition like a mouse in a trap and were pounded by the American artillery. Early on 24 December we decided to break out. It succeeded. For thirty hours we marched behind the American lines and, on Christmas Eve towards midnight, broke through their lines from the rear and crossed a raging torrent under rattling machine gun fire. That took all the strength we had. Many brave soldiers died during the crossing either because their strength was no longer up to it or their hearts gave out. In addition, I was carrying a wounded man with me. In the morning hours of the first day of Christmas, we got back to our own lines looking like wandering icicles. We had been able to thumb our noses at the Americans and save 850 soldiers for the German Army. We can be proud. Now we are re-equipping for new tasks. 19

Peiper was ordered to form a Kampfgruppe from the tanks which were still available and to move to Ober- and Nieder-Emmels, to the northeast of St. Vith. His command post was in Blanche Fontaine at Petit-Thier. Panzergruppe Peiper was dissolved by order of the division, effective 26 December 1944. On this day, Jochen Peiper was recommended for the award of the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross by Oberführer Mohnke:

SS-Obersturmbannführer Peiper, who has continuously distinguished himself in the campaigns of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division "LSSAH" since August 1941, and who has already been awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, has once again distinguished himself during the first days of the counter offensive in the west. As the commander of the division's Panzergruppe, he proved equal to every situation through his decisive daring and cold-bloodedness, coupled with his outstanding leadership ability.

After overcoming considerable road and terrain difficulties and making contact with the 3. Fallschirmjäger-Division at Lanzerath, the Panzergruppe pushed into the strongly held Honsfeld by surprise in the early morning of 17 December 1944, took it and captured the bulk of an American reconnaissance battalion. Exploiting this success, he immediately headed for Büllingen. In spite of a strong defense, his outflanking attack succeeded and 12 enemy aircraft and a large amount of military equipment fell into the group's hands. Without regard to threats to his flanks, only driven by the thoughts of a deep thrust, the

Panzergruppe moved on through Möderscheid, Schoppen and Faymonville to Ligneuville. During this movement it destroyed an enemy supply column at Baugnez. After wiping out a blocking unit which had been sent against them, it put to flight the staff of the US 49th Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade. Without regard to safety and without stopping, the Panzergruppe, with its commander in front, pushed on after the withdrawing enemy and, by evening, it was in front of Stavelot.

After regrouping, he attacked Stavelot on the morning of 18 December 1944 against fierce enemy resistance greatly assisted by terrain, captured the bridge intact and advanced immediately through Trois-Ponts to La Gleize. By 1430 hours the village had been captured in the face of a stubborn, tough defense. Cheneux and Stoumont were also captured in spite of an incredibly hard fighting enemy. Then he was forced to stop because of fueling problems. Cut off from the rest of the division, the Panzergruppe held out against the enemy forces which increased on a daily basis and inflicted heavy casualties on them.

Since 20 December 1944 it was able to repel up to 14 attacks in a single day by the US 3rd Armored Division and the US 30th Infantry Division. When on 22 December 1944 the elements of his unit at Stoumont and Cheneux were threatened with being surrounded, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper decided to pull back all of his elements to La Gleize. Once again at the mercy of the material superiority of these divisions, an heroic battle developed for every meter of ground. Sustained by the immense fighting will of their commander, however, all these attacks were repulsed by the troops. When there were no tanks left able to move and the last shell had been fired, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper received the order to break out in the evening of 23 December1944.

Taking everything that was still militarily useful with it, the Kampfgruppe, consisting of 800 men, set out on 24 December 1944 at 0200 hours, undetected by the enemy and, after a 22-hour march through trackless, mountainous, forested terrain through the middle of the enemy forces under conditions of enormous physical exertion, reached the enemy's lines at Roglin Vale. In spite of the alerting of every enemy unit in this sector of the front and the use of fighter and artillery observation aircraft searching for Kampfgruppe Peiper, it broke through the enemy defense in a desperate and surprising assault and, mostly swimming, made it across the Salm to our lines on the opposite bank. During this crossing SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper was wounded while at the head of his Kampfgruppe.

Because of the surprising thrust by the Panzergruppe under SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper's command deep into enemy territory, the enemy was forced to pull several divisions out of the Aachen – Jülich area. These divisions were then fixed by the resistance of the Panzergruppe until our units in action further south had managed to gain ground further west.

The Panzergruppe destroyed or captured:

21 tanks knocked out (tank action)

6 tanks in close combat

50 heavy antitank guns destroyed and

12 antitank/antiaircraft guns

Aircraft: 2 fighters shot down; 12 aircraft captured and destroyed.

An entire reconnaissance battalion captured with its equipment at Honsfeld, including some 15 armored cars and 35 halftracks. Wheeled vehicles captured or destroyed: 180 motorized vehicles of all kinds.

Enemy casualties: about 300 enemy killed, 450 prisoners (including four staff officers.)

I request that this highly deserving and extremely brave SS officer be awarded the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.<sup>20</sup>

On 26 December 1944 Peiper recommended the commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal, for the Knight's Cross. On 28 December 1944 the commander of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß was recommended for the Knight's Cross, and the cannon section leader of that company, SS-Unterscharführer Karl Übler, was recommended for the Honor Roll Clasp. Likewise, SS-Oberscharführer Erich Strelow of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Franz Sievers, commander of the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon, and SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke were also suggested for the Honor Roll Clasp.

# The Panzer Regiment in Action under Poetschke at Bastogne: 28 December 1944 to 12 January 1945

SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 had a short rest and refitting in the Petit-Their – Burtonville area. On 28 December Heeresgruppe B ordered the 1. SS-Panzer-Division to move out, in order to take the important junction at Bastogne, which had already been the scene of bitter fighting. On the evening of 28 December 1944 the tanks moved into the area of Oberwampach. SS-Hauptsturmführer Möbius commanded the operational Tigers and SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke had overall command of the tanks, so that Peiper had no combat mission. Along with SS-Sturmbannführer Ralf Tiemann, the Leibstandarte's operations officer, Peiper visited the command post of the 5. Fallschirmjäger-Division, located in a railway tunnel south of Schimpach. The exact extent of the front held by the division remained unclear despite the visit.1 The course of the fighting in the next few days may be summarized as follows: Poetschke and the elements of the Leibstandarte fighting southeast of Bastogne met with little success. The attack on Lutrebois on 30 December 1944 cost the 7. Kompanie six tanks, while the 6. Kompanie was halted at Remonfosse by an attack of the US 4th Armored Division. Peiper visited Poetschke's command post in front of Bastogne several times.2

#### **Observations**

Looking back at the Ardennes Offensive, it is evident that there was a massive expenditure of men and materièl in an attempt to reach the Meuse. Why couldn't this mission be accomplished in spite of strong German tank forces? The Ardennes, the attack sector, is a medium altitude mountain range with forested heights and deeply cut river valleys and offers no cover for military vehicles along its ascending and descending roads. Generally, the roads in the Ardennes run in a north-south direction, while Panzergruppe Peiper had to attack in a east-west direction. As a result, it was frequently forced to turn off onto farm roads. The Americans frequently blew up bridges right in front of Peiper's tanks, bridges which were vitally necessary for the advance across the Amel, Salm, and Lienne. Again and again, Peiper had to look for a new route. This cost him precious time.

The precarious fuel situation became the main problem facing Peiper on 19 December 1944, however, and there was no solution. The breakthrough which Peiper made couldn't be exploited by the Panzergrenadiere of Hansen's and Sandig's Kampfgruppen, as they were unable to follow Peiper quickly enough on the muddy and icy roads. The blocking of Stavelot meant that no more of the German units could join the surrounded Panzergruppe at La Gleize, to say nothing of supplies. Thanks to Peiper's strong personality, his unshakeable will to hold out, and the intact morale and unbending courage of his soldiers, he managed to bring 800 men from his Kampfgruppe out of the pocket back to his division after a 33-hour forced march behind the enemy. Jochen Peiper summarized it in his characteristically ironic style: "... what a poor show put up by three US divisions, when they couldn't wipe out a small German Kampfgruppe with neither fuel nor ammunition, and allowed the latter to blow up all its material before it marched right through the sleeping enemy, unshaken and unbroken."1

The Panzer regiment's losses in the Ardennes Offensive are given in the following incomplete list: 34 killed in action, 58 wounded, 23 captured, and 6 missing.<sup>2</sup> These figures apply to the regimental Headquarters Company, the Supply Company and the 1., 2. and 6.Panzer-Kompanien. Only those killed in action are considered for the 7. Kompanie, while there are no casualty figures available for the 9. and 10. Kompanien of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. The losses of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 must be estimated as far higher. Only 19 unwounded men from the 11. (gep.) Kompanie supposedly came back from La Gleize <sup>3</sup>, and 11 men returned from the two SPW platoons of the 3. (gep.) Pionier-Kompanie which participated in Peiper's advance. <sup>4</sup> The losses of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 were not given.

The US 30th Infantry Division opposing Peiper at La Gleize lost 487 men, among them 97 killed in action. Furthermore, there were an additional 472 missing, most of whom were taken prisoner by the Germans. The losses suffered by the task forces of the US 3rd Armored Division and the 740th Armored Battalion, which lost 23 tanks, are unknown.

Many readers will ask with what motivation did these German soldiers go into the Ardennes Offensive after five years of war. To close the description of this offensive, the company runner for the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Sturmmann (officer candidate) Helmut Naumann, who was wounded at La Gleize, gave his personal opinion:

At that time I was 19 years old and fairly idealistic and, on top of that, still quite inexperienced. I had formed the conviction that among men there was something like genius, that is, that some men selected by heaven were geniuses and were far above all the others. In the final analysis, genius would always conquer, as the mob of others could do little against it. Yes, and I also believed Adolf Hitler was a genius. And from that came the conviction that I was in the right place in his guard unit. Of course, in Normandy I had personally experienced the material superiority of the Americans but, on the other hand, I believed that I knew that we were better soldiers and we could compensate for the shells that others sent at us by our bravery. And as long as Hitler lived, for me, nothing was lost. His genius would prove decisive. <sup>5</sup>



Tiger "222" of the 2./SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 on 17 December 1944 at Kaiserbarracke with mounted paratroopers – Koos, Lentz, Löwe and Hess.



Panzergrenadiere of Max Hansen's SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 attacking in the Ardennes.



Advancing grenadiers.



SS-Oberscharführer August Wien, tank commander in the advanced guard, was knocked out on 17 December 1944 at Büllingen and killed in action.



Attacking Panzergrenadiere.



SS-Sturmmann (officer candidate) Helmut Naumann, company runner in the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 during the Ardennes Offensive.



SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, commander of the advance guard in the first days of the Ardennes Offensive and, starting at the end of December 1944, company commander of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 until the end of the war.



SS-Sturmmann Wilhelm Nußshag was the continuous wave radio operator in Peiper's command tank from October 1944 until January 1945.



SS-Unterscharführer Walter Wrabetz, tank commander in the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Obersturmführer Friedrich Christ, commanded the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Hauptscharführer August Tonk of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was a part of the advance guard during the Ardennes Offensive. Here seen in France in 1940, Tonk is wearing the Spanish Cross from the Spanish Civil War.



SS-Unterscharführer Erich Straßgschwandtner, SPW section leader in the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



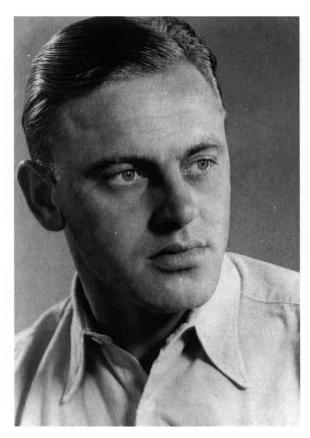
SS-Sturmmann Fritz Eckmann, radio operator in the 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



The schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 of SS-Obersturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen was attached to the Panzer regiment of the Leibstandarte during the Ardennes Offensive.



SS-Oberscharführer Heinrich Burk, tank commander in the 7. Kompanie/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



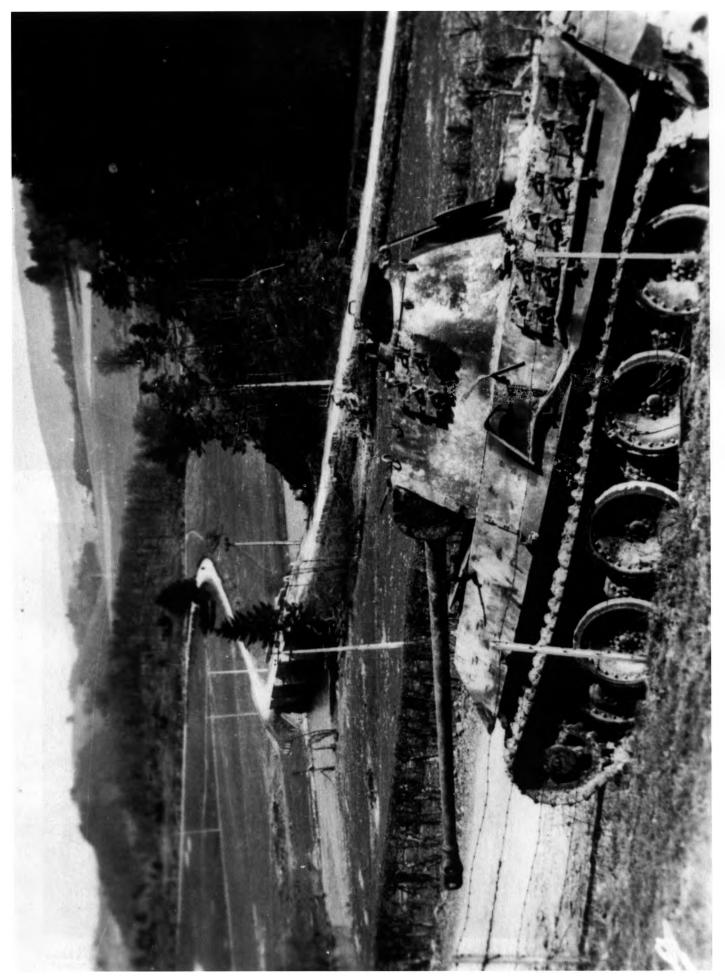
Axel Rodenburg, SS-Unterscharführer and cannon SPW driver in the 12. (s.gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SPW of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 on 17 December 1944 at Honsfeld.

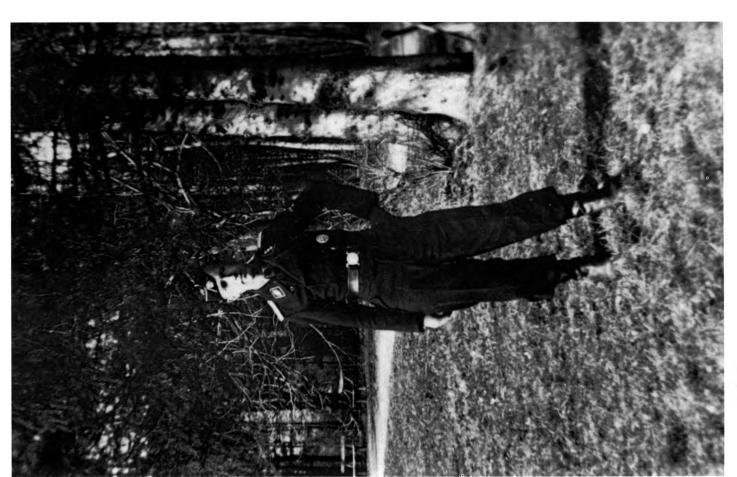


Tiger "105" belonging to the commander of the 1./SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101, SS-Obersturmführer Jürgen Wessel, which drove into a house in Stavelot by accident.





SS-Untersturmführer Erich Münkemer, commander of the 2nd platoon of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Buchheim, Poetschke's signals officer in the I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Rottenführer Paul Zwigart, SPW driver in the 9. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, the Nahkampfspange in Silver, the Driver's Badge in Gold and the Infantry Assault Badge in Bronze among many other decorations. He was Diefenthal's driver during the Ardennes Offensive. By the time he was wounded on 28 March 1945 in Hungary he had survived 48 close-combat days.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Birnschein, company commander of the 3./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Rottenführer Paul Bender, radio operator in the 2./SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501.



SS-Sturmmann Gerhard Walla, staff driver for SS-Sturmbammführer Poetschke. He participated in the Ardennes Offensive in the motorcycle terrain reconnaissance platoon.



SS-Rottenführer Rolf Ehrhardt, driver for the company commander's tank in 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke on the morning of 19 December 1944 at the eastern outskirts of Stoumont. A moment later he picked up the Panzerfaust lying on the ground in front of him and joined the battle in the front lines.



Panther of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Stoumont on 19 December 1944.



Panther "221" of SS-Hauptscharführer Heinz Knappich of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 at La Gleize.



Panzer IV of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 which was knocked out on 30 December 1944 at Lutrebois.



Panther knocked out in the woods at Remonfosse.

#### Jochen Peiper Receives the Swords to the Oak Leaves

On 11 January 1945 SS-Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper was awarded the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross. He received a radio message from Berlin from Adolf Hitler which read as follows: "In consideration of your continuous display of heroism, I award you the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross as the 119th soldier of the Wehrmacht to be so distinguished. Signed: Adolf Hitler." 1

It is unclear as to who presented Peiper with the Swords. According to Adolf Hitler's adjutant, SS-Sturmbannführer Otto Günsche, and other members of the close circle around the Führer in the Reich Chancellery during that period, Peiper had not been in Berlin to receive the Swords from the hand of the Führer, as would normally have been the case.<sup>2</sup>

It is likely that SS-Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich presented the Swords to Peiper in his function as Commander-in-Chief of the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee. Peiper was the 119th Soldier of the Wehrmacht to receive this decoration, one of the highest decorations in the Wehrmacht. With this, Peiper stood at the pinnacle of his career. He was a regimental commander and, a few days before his thirtieth birthday, he was decorated with the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross.

In January 1945 Peiper visited his family briefly at Lake Tegern and then went to Berlin. On 4 February 1945 he visited the Reichsführer SS in Field Headquarters "Birkenwald" ("Birch Forest") at Prenzlau in the Uckermark district. The two had a long conversation before and after the noon meal. The degree to which Himmler disclosed his efforts to establish a truce with the western Allies to Peiper is unclear. However, it must be assumed that both men quite openly discussed Germany's fatal position, as Peiper spoke very freely to Himmler. Together with Himmler, and his head adjutant from the Waffen-SS, SS-Obersturmbannführer Werner Grothmann, Peiper went on an auto trip through bombedout Berlin. Himmler showed himself resolute in the face of the tremendous amount of destruction caused by the British and the Americans.<sup>3</sup>

### Short Rest and Refitting, and Transfer to Hungary: January and February 1945

Soviet divisions were in front of Königsberg, at Elbing, and on the Baltic, and the Oder River Line between Stettin and Breslau was in great danger. The inhuman behavior of the Soviet troops in the villages that they had captured in east Germany shocked the people in this region. Numberless bands of refugees, genuine trains of misery full of unfortunate people – mostly women, the aged, and the ill, as well as children – were on their way to the west to save their lives from the Mongol storm from the Soviet steppes which was threatening their homeland. Germany and Europe were in deadly danger. The western Allies also stood on the Reich's western borders and had already crossed them in some places.

Illusions destroyed, depressed and with a feeling of helplessness, Peiper left the bombed-out rubble of the German capital. In order to look over suitable personnel, Peiper went to the SS Panzergrenadier School in Kienschlag and on 14 February 1945 discussed additional details and personnel requirements with the School Commander, SS-Standartenführer Hanne Kempin.

Following that he rode his VW-Kübelwagen to the SS Artillery School in Beneschau. After that, Peiper headed out to his regiment which had been transferred to Hungary in the meantime.

SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 were located in the area of Brühl, Bonn and Euskirchen after the Ardennes Offensive, where they received a rest and refitting, and were to some extent re-equipped with new tanks.<sup>2</sup> In order to compensate for the casualties suffered during the Ardennes offensive, officers, noncommissioned officers and enlisted personnel were transferred to the I. Abteilung from the tankless companies of the II. (gemischte) Abteilung which had stayed behind at Rahden. The 1. Kompanie received SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, and the 2. Kompanie was taken over again by its former veteran commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Hans Malkomes. SS-Untersturmführer Helmut Pönisch became the signals officer for the I. Abteilung again.

The SPW-Bataillon was at Siegburg and was equipped with new SPW which were armed with either 2 cm triple-barreled Flak or with the MG 81. The 12. (schwere gep.) Kompanie consisted of two cannon platoons and the triple-barreled Flak platoon.3 SS-Obersturmführer Dieter Kohler took over the 9. (gep.) Kompanie in place of SS-Untersturmführer Leike who was killed in action, and a new platoon leader, SS-Untersturmführer Falk, also joined that company. On 30 January 1945 the battalion commander, Jupp Diefenthal, became a SS-Sturmbannführer, and the commander of the 12. (schwere gep.) Kompanie, the veteran SS-Hauptscharführer Jochen Thiele, became a SS-Untersturmführer. The 11. (gep.) Kompanie received a new platoon leader in SS-Untersturmführer Kuno Balz, who had been with the company in 1943 as an SS-Sturmmann. Company Commanders Kohler, Preuß, Tomhardt and Thiele were veteran fighters in the SPW-Bataillon. The 2. and 3. Kompanien of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 received a few repaired Tiger II's.

Around 20 January 1945 the Panzer regiment began to load up and move out by train, and SS-Untersturmführer Pönisch was in charge of the rail transport. Starting 24 January 1945, the 2. and 4./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 entrained at Brüggen, and the 3. Kompanie and the Supply Company entrained at Brühl. On 6 January 1945 the 1. Kompanie had received six Tiger II's at Sennelager and was rail transported from there.4 The 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 also entrained at Brühl. The companies of the I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 were also loaded for rail transport and the first train went by way of central Germany -Linz - Vienna to reach Gänserndorf near Vienna, where the 1. Kompanie under SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff was unloaded. This train had gone to the wrong destination and the company received no orders at Gänserndorf. Wolff was then informed in Vienna that the Panzer regiment had gone to Raab in Hungary. The Panthers were loaded up again and the company detrained in Raab (Györ) on 3 February 1945. It road marched through Bácsa and Vének and across the Danube to occupy quarters at Kisbajcs on the man-made island on the broad flood plain between the old and new beds of the Danube River. The entire I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 had its billets there. SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke established his command post at Raab.5

SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck had taken over the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, while SS-Hauptsturmführer Oskar

Klingelhöfer continued to command the 7. Panzer-Kompanie. At the time only portions of his company were in Hungary. Elements of it were at Rahden and would only arrive later in Hungary with the new tanks they received there. The 9. (Pi.) and the 10. (Flak) Kompanien were still commanded by SS-Obersturmführer Erich Rumpf and Karl-Heinz Vögler. There were no changes in command in the Tiger Battalion. SS-Obersturmführer Jürgen Wessel commanded the 1. Kompanie, consisting of only six Tigers, SS-Hauptsturmführer Rolf Möbius the 2. Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Birnschein the 3. Kompanie and SS-Hauptsturmführer Wilhelm Spitz the 4. (leichte) Kompanie.

On 1 January 1945 SS-Oberscharführer Hans Siptrott, platoon leader in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was presented the German Cross in Gold which he had been awarded on 30 December 1945. He was also awarded the 3rd level of the Panzerkampfabzeichen for 50 days of armored combat on 30 January 1945.7 On 6 January 1945 SS-Oberscharführer Theo Jensen of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, who was killed in Normandy on 25 July 1944, was awarded the German Cross in Gold. On 12 January 1945 SS-Hauptscharführer Ernst Otto was presented with the German Cross in Gold which he was awarded on 30 December 1944 as commander of the 4. Kompanie.8 At that juncture he was commanding the regiment's Supply Company. On 5 February 1945 the commanders of the SPW-Bataillon and the 10. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal and SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, received the Knight's Cross for their actions in the Ardennes. In schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, attached to Peiper, SS-Oberscharführer Jürgen Brandt, platoon leader in the 2. Kompanie, who was killed in action on 25 December 1944 at Petit Spa, was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 13 January 1945. SS-Untersturmführer Thomas Amselgruber of the 3. Kompanie was also awarded the German Cross in Gold on 14 February 1945.9

In addition, a number of noncommissioned officers and men of the I. (gemischte) Abteilung of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 received decorations for their actions in the Ardennes. During the course of an officer's call on 1 February 1945, SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser was presented with the Iron Cross, 1st Class by SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke. Reiser, Poetschke's former adjutant, was assigned to the 1. Kompanie as a platoon leader for the coming operation, and SS-Untersturmführer Walter Schoof, whom Poetschke already knew from the "Das Reich" Division, became the new adjutant.<sup>10</sup>

It took three weeks to complete the transport of the division. The men of the Panzer regiment at Raab followed the Wehrmacht Reports closely. The development of the situation on the various fronts was taking on an increasingly threatening aspect. The men who had family in east Germany were happy to hear whenever their families had found refuge in the west. However, there were only a few who had this certainty concerning the fate of their families. The ethnic Germans had already lost their homeland; many without any word as to the fate of their families. A number of tankers had lost their parents, wives or girl friends in the bombing campaigns of the British and Americans. Inwardly depressed, they all waited for the coming operation.

On the German and the Allied side it had been expected that the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee would be employed in the defense of the German capital and be moved into the area southeast of Berlin. Even Generaloberst Guderian, the Army Chief of Staff, requested that this powerful army be moved there. But Hitler had other

plans. He wanted a well-prepared offensive to secure the oil region in the Drau – Danube area for German fuel supply and hoped that this would switch the Soviet attack from the Berlin area into this region. Preparations were carried out under very tight security. The Cottbus – Guben – Forst area was set up as the unloading area for the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee. SS-Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich maintained an imaginary command post in Fürstenwalde.

How had the situation in Hungary developed? On 20 August 1944 the Red Army launched its major offensive from the Jassy area towards Bucharest and from the Tiraspol area towards Bulgaria across the lower reaches of the Danube between Russe and Varna. Three days later Rumania under King Michael I abandoned Germany and broke diplomatic relations. All Rumanian units ceased fighting and, as a result, made it possible for the Soviets to get to Bucharest and the lower Danube without opposition. The militarily important oil region of Ploesti was lost. Following that Hungary also broke its word and, on 11 October 1944, offered a truce to the Soviets. The High Command of the Army immediately declared Hungary a combat zone and a special operations unit under Skorzeny took Hungary's Regent Horthy prisoner, who repudiated his offer to the Russians. Some Hungarian units fought with the Wehrmacht right to the end of the war.

In December 1944 the 3rd Ukrainian Front advanced all the way to Lake Balaton and occupied the area lying between the Danube and the Drau. This placed the last oil region in acute danger. On 24 December 1944 Budapest and its strong German garrison was surrounded by the Russians. To relieve Budapest, the IV. SS-Panzer-Korps was transferred from the Warsaw area to Hungary. On 1 January 1945 its divisions went into action and, after a very promising offensive, were halted by higher orders some 20 kilometers from the city. The troops couldn't understand the order to halt, as it appeared that their attack for the relief of their surrounded comrades in Budapest had broken through.

### Operation "South Wind" – Smashing the Soviet Bridgehead on the Gran: 17 to 24 February 1945

The Soviets had built a 17 kilometer deep bridgehead west of the Gran in January 1945. On 8 January 1945 the spearheads of the Soviet attack reached Komorn and Neuhäusel, where they were thrown back by German counterattacks. By the end of January 1945, the front ran along the line Karva – Kurt – Barta – Csata and was being established for the defense. The Soviet bridgehead on the Gran presented a considerable danger to the planned German offensive "Awakening Spring," as it permitted the Soviets to attack across the Danube to the south right into the middle of the German approach area. To eliminate this danger, the 1. SS-Panzer-Division was to advance from the Farnad area to Bart, cross the Parizsky Canal and take Nana and Parkany.

The divisions of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps had received cover designations for the upcoming operation. The corps was called Southern Sector Staff and the Leibstandarte became the SS Replacement Group "Totenkopf". The tactical signs on divisional and corps vehicles were painted over and the cuff titles were also removed to help the deception. The Leibstandarte began its approach march on 12 February 1945. The Panzer regiment moved from Raab through Komorn to Neuhäusel. Panzergruppe Peiper, consisting of the I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1,

schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, the III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, elements of the I. (gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 1 and the 3. (gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1, was established again as a tactical Kampfgruppe. Peiper commanded the Panzergruppe, SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke the I. (gemischte) Abteilung, SS-Obersturmbannführer von Westernhagen schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, SS-Sturmbannführer Diefenthal the SPW-Bataillon, and SS-Hauptsturmführer Kalischko I. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regiment 1.

On 10 February 1945 the Tiger Battalion received another 13 Tiger II's and the 4. (leichte) Kompanie, along with the existing combat engineer and reconnaissance platoons, added one newly formed platoon each of "Wirbelwind" and "Ostwind" Flak. On 12 February 1945 Peiper had 25 Panthers, 21 Panzer IV's and one command Panther in the I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Of these, the 1. and 2. Kompanien had 12 and 13 Panthers respectively, while the 6. and 7. Kompanien had 10 and 11 Panzer IV's respectively. On 12 February 1945 schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 consisted of 34 Tiger II's and two command tanks. The 1. Kompanie had 6 Tigers and the 2. and 3. Kompanien each had the authorized strength of 14 Tigers each.

During the night movement of the Panzer regiment, an officer of an army patrol shone a light on the tanks of the 1. Kompanie in spite of enemy air activity. After he was yelled at without result, SS-Obersturmführer Wolff simply shot out his flashlight. At Komorn, a guard blocked the bridge across the Danube. As this would have meant an 80 kilometer detour and a considerable loss of time, Wolff, on his own initiative, had each individual Panther drive across the swaying bridge.<sup>4</sup>

On 15 February 1945 SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor of the Waffen-SS Otto Kumm relieved SS-Oberführer Mohnke of his command of the Leibstandarte division. Kumm had made a name for himself as the commander of the "Der Führer" Regiment in the 2. SS-Panzer-Division "Das Reich" and, after Kharkov, had been awarded the Oak Leaves. Later, he commanded the "Eugen" Gebirgs-Division in protracted fighting in the Balkans against Tito's partisans.

After Peiper had informed Poetschke concerning the final details of the upcoming attack on 16 February 1945, Poetschke informed his company commanders and platoon leaders of the attack objectives, terrain features on the Gran, and organization of friendly units, using the sand table.<sup>5</sup> Peiper launched the attack on 17 February 1945. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser, platoon leader in the 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 under SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff, was at the head of this tank attack:

At dawn, we too were on our way and we followed the Army infantry division, which had gone into action to break through the Russian main lines. The road and terrain conditions were bad. Fields and meadows were under water and the tanks leaving their ready positions wallowed through the deep, heavy soil. The 1. Kompanie took the point and afterwards the right wing as flank security for our attack sector. We were still moving on roads, and we went rapidly forward. Then we moved past the former main battle line and halted in a depression. In the meantime mortar fire started, with the shells bursting far behind us. After a short situation briefing (Peiper, Poetschke and Diefenthal), we continued on our way. The battalion formed up for the attack to the left of the road which went to Nem. Seldin.

We started forward, deeply echeloned in a broad wedge.

Moving on the right wing with my 2nd platoon, and hanging somewhat back, I took over flank security. We began to take antitank gun fire from Nem. Seldin. As we intended to bypass the village, we increased our speed (deep plowed soil!) and escaped the fire by making use of the rolling terrain. We halted in the cover of a hill in front of us and assembled for the attack. We began to receive fire from mortars and Stalin organs. Ivan must have noticed that we were assembling in this reverse slope position. After the SPW of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and the Panzergrenadiere of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 had closed up, the Kampfgruppe launched a determined attack on the day's objective, the Parizsky Canal.

With the Panthers and Tigers in front, followed by the Panzer IV's and the SPW, we rolled over the hill and immediately replied to the massive fire of the Russian antitank guns. By our concentrated fire and rapid armor attack, we succeeded in smashing the antitank gun barrier and pushing the Russians out of their positions. Ivan fled in advance of the force of our attack. As twilight fell, our lead elements reached the canal at Gywa, however, the bridge had been blown up.<sup>6</sup>

SS-Sturmmann Reinhold Kyriss, loader in the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, experienced the attack as follows:

Toward noon, the Panzergruppe assembled for the attack in a reverse slope position. The mission was clear. We had to break through a strong antitank gun front. Obersturmbannführer Peiper gave himself time, he wanted to be on the safe side, which proved to have been the right thing to do. Peiper had five King Tigers go to the top of the hill. What a picture! They stood there on top of the hill like on a serving tray and were immediately fired on by the Russian antitank guns. You could see the antitank gun shells bouncing off the front plates of the King Tigers. It must have been a real shock for the Russians when the King Tigers took their turn and destroyed one antitank gun after the other. The antitank gun fire died down and Peiper immediately ordered: "Panzer, Marsch!"

As the Kampfgruppe moved across the top of the hill en masse, fireworks erupted — in the truest sense of the word. The tanks and SPW rolled along at full speed. They were firing from every barrel they had and, in the slowly gathering dusk, you could more easily see the tracer rounds and shell explosions. It was an imposing sight. Faced with this armor attack, carried out like a cavalry charge, the Russians could only do one thing: clear out! After rolling over this antitank gun front, we stopped to regroup. To our surprise, the Russians had taken along most of their guns with them under cover of darkness. Kampfgruppe Peiper suffered no casualties in this attack.<sup>7</sup>

SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper went into the attack against the Gran Bridgehead in his command Panther.8 Shortly before the beginning of the offensive, Peiper's former communications officer, SS-Hauptsturmführer Helmut Jahn, arrived back at the regiment. He had commanded a signals company for the Reichsführer SS in Neuhausen (Schwarzwald) and Schönermark near Prenzlau since the autumn of 1944. Jahn had brought Peiper's continuous wave radio operator, SS-Unterscharführer Horst Schumann, with him and both had climbed aboard Peiper's tank. Peiper's command Panther crew consisted of signals officer, SS-Hauptsturmführer Helmut Jahn, as gunner, SS-Unterscharführer Horst Schumann as continuous wave radio operator, SS-Rottenführer Paul Schierig as voice operator and

loader and SS-Oberscharführer Otto Becker as driver. All of them had had already been part of Peiper's tank crew in Russia.9

SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke also participated in this attack in his Panther. He continuously led his battalion from in front, as his men were accustomed to him doing. Peiper wrote about him: "After breaking through the enemy antitank gun barrier at Hill 190 and southeast of Nemet Szögyen, he made it possible for the Panzergrenadiere to cross the Parisz sector. He did that by a reckless advance against an enemy fighting with stubborn ferocity, while disregarding his flanks." <sup>10</sup>

The Panzergrenadiere under Obersturmbannführer Max Hansen and Bernhard Siebken followed Peiper. During the night they established a bridgehead across the Parizsky Canal and, on the morning of 8 February 1945, were able to expand it further to the south against stubborn Russian resistance. After the engineers had made the bridges over the canal usable, Peiper's Panzergruppe resumed its attack around noon and, although attacked by ground support aircraft, passed through Särkanyfalva to reach the heights at Libad - Béla. It crossed the Köbölkût - Parkany road late in the afternoon. During the night the tanks went into a hedgehog formation for all-around defense: to the west on the road leading to Köbölkût, to the east on the Parkany railroad station road and to the south toward Muzsla. SS-Hauptscharführer Eduard Maron, a platoon leader in Preuß' 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, had again particularly distinguished himself in this fighting and was considered as a candidate for the Knight's Cross. The 21-year-old "Ede" Maron from Andreashütte in Upper Silesia, who had already won the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Nahkampfspange in Silver, was severely wounded during this action and died of his wounds on 11 April 1945 in Ramsau. SS-Untersturmführer Günther Borchers of the 9./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 described the attack:

It was a tank attack like in our best days. King Tigers, Panthers and SPW rolled unstoppably at top speed toward the positions. The first vehicles hit mines. Firing from both sides, the mines were cleared and on we went. Szögyen, Bator-Keszi, Köbölkût, Muzsla and other village were captured. The locals cheered us on. They had had much to suffer under the Russian occupation. Women of every age had been raped; They were dragged into their trenches. We stopped at Nemet Szögyen and formed an allround defense.<sup>11</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer Jochen Thiele, commander of the 12. (schwere gep.)/2nd SS-Panzer Grenadier regiment, was wounded in the hand and ordered to the regimental convalescent center at Steinach. The commander of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff, called an orders group. While Wolff explained his plan, the veteran platoon leader, SS-Oberscharführer Erich Strelow, told his friends standing around him that they "would be able to light candles for him tomorrow." <sup>12</sup> On the morning of 19 February 1945 SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke called a meeting concerning the situation. The Panzergruppe was attacked in its ready positions north of Muzsla by ground-support aircraft, which cost tank losses and wounded. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie was a part of the attack on the Parkany railroad station which was executed shortly after the aircraft attack:

Then it was our turn. The order for the attack arrived by radio and, straddling the road, we started off with the remaining seven tanks of the 1. Kompanie. I advanced to the left with the three

remaining Panthers of my platoon. We moved between the road and railway towards the railroad station. The soil was even deeper there, and we didn't go as fast or as relentlessly in this terrain. Ivan attacked us from short range with tanks right into our open right flank from the cover of the embankment. One Panther of my platoon was knocked out and stopped moving. After it was hit for the second time, I can still see in my mind how the crew dismounted. By pushing forward rapidly, I finally reached the railroad grounds and found cover behind a storage shed.

Oberscharführer Strelow, the platoon leader of the 3rd platoon, pulled into position next to me. Then there was a loud explosion at close range and his tank caught fire – the crew bailed out. Covered by the burning tank, I pulled back, moved around the shed, and inched my way forward slowly from the other side until I could see the T-34 – a side shot and not 50 meters away in front of me. It was only seconds until my gunner had "acquired" him. With the first round it caught on fire, the second knocked the cupola off! Then Tigers and Panthers from the 2. Kompanie which had advanced to the left of the road closed up and joined the tank battle. Two more enemy tanks were destroyed, a third T-34 turned around and disappeared behind the railroad and pushed – moving rapidly – into the northeast section of Parkany. 13

SS-Oberscharführer Erich Strelow of the 1. Kompanie was killed in action. He would be unable to wear the Honor Roll Clasp awarded him on 25 February 1945 for his actions in the Ardennes. As they reached the road to Parkany, the tanks were attacked by ground-support aircraft which caused more loses. Toward 1300 hours Tigers and Panthers broke into the northeastern section of Parkany, and the SPW-Bataillon wheeled to the northeast and took Nana. SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck's 6. Panzer-Kompanie also advanced to Nana. In the late afternoon Peiper's tanks assembled at the foot of the vineyard northwest of the Parkany railroad station.

SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke and the I. (gemischte) Abteilung had performed outstandingly in this fighting. As a result Peiper proposed Poetschke for the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross a few days later:

After the bridge was completed on 18 February 1945, he got his battalion across and during the night prepared for a thrust to the south. During the night fighting his Panzergruppe gave the decisive blow against the southern defenses of the enemy bridgehead. In a wild, aggressive drive, his tanks overran the wildly firing antitank gun nests at Kis – Muzsla psz. and in front of Muzsla and Parkany, established contact with the southern group there, which had crossed the Danube in assault boats, and smashed through to the Gran, pulling the infantry along with them. 14

As a result of this attack, the Soviets were defeated in the southern part of their Gran Bridgehead between the Parizsky Canal and the Danube. The Leibstandarte was put back into action against the remnants of the bridgehead in the north toward Kam. Darmoty. In order to get supplies of fuel and ammunition, a tank element remained initially at Parkany, while the other elements of Peiper's group headed north during the night of 19/20 February 1945. However, the Kampfgruppe bogged down in front of Kam. Darmoty from heavy artillery fire from the east bank of the Gran and waves of ground support air attacks. The 6. Panzer-Kompanie attacked Köhidgyarmat, west of the Gran. <sup>15</sup> Max Hansen's Panzergrenadiere followed along.

In the night of 20/21 February, Peiper attacked Kam. Darmoty

with infantry mounted on his tanks. SS-Untersturmführer Reiser participated in this attack:

The 1. Kompanie still had five Panthers fit for combat. My tank crew on that day was quite extraordinary. Hauptscharführer Pidan, whose tank was out of service, wanted to come along at any price, but not one of my crew wanted to voluntarily stay behind, so we took off with six men! We raced across the lightly falling terrain directly beneath the chain of hills which run west of the highway and railroad line toward Kam Darmoty. The enemy artillery was only firing harassing fire. When we got to the village we swung to the east to make a frontal push. We ran into massive Russian defensive artillery fire. A curtain of iron and flame smashed down in front of us. Flares and tracer rounds lit up the night and showed us the way to the Russian positions.

We wanted to break through this wall of fire in a rapid thrust; we went into this annihilating fire with "full steam ahead." We rattled across the rail line – then there was a flash and an explosion – we'd been hit. I couldn't say whether we had received a direct hit from an enemy tank, antitank gun or artillery round. We caught fire immediately! Orders to bail out weren't necessary, but first the turret had to be turned, as the gun was blocking the driver's hatch. Finally we did it. My gunner followed me as the last out of the turret. We landed in one of Ivan's trenches. They were as surprised as we were. Only armed with pistols and our naked fists, we defended ourselves man to man in a well constructed trench system. Under the "protection" of the burning tank and the detonating ammunition, we finished off the Russians and all made it back safely.<sup>16</sup>

Peiper's Panzergruppe captured Kam. Darmoty around 2100 hours. The 6. Panzer-Kompanie was fighting in Köhidgyarmat. Characteristic of the inner strength which maintained the officers and men during the difficult but successful attacks against the Soviet Gran Bridgehead is the mood described by the commander of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, to his young wife:

... I got back from the fighting yesterday evening and found I had letters from you ... The last few days have been hard and difficult. But they have lightened our hearts, because we have been able to hit the enemy a destructive blow and all those soldiers who thought they were tired out and who believed that the enemy was unconquerable have lost these beliefs and gained some backbone. We are not only as good as we used to be, we're even better. But even so this time we didn't come off unscathed. I picked up this stupid piece of shrapnel. You don't have to worry about it. This time it really is "small potatoes." A piece of shrapnel in the face, a finger's width under the right eye. At the moment it is sitting firmly against the upper jaw and you can well imagine that I have some difficulty when eating. But all in all, just a slight blemish to my beauty. Main thing – the eye's all right! ...

In this action I was able to honorably represent the company. The company fought honorably and proudly. It is truly the "first" – My First Kompanie – I am proud to command this unit. With such men we will certainly win – Oh, I have to go see Peiper – Jochen – I'll write you some more if we don't move out again this evening. 17

On 22 February 1945 Peiper pushed north to the fork in the road between Kam. Darmoty and Kemend. On 24 February 1945 the attack ordered by Armee-Oberkommando 8 on the remnants of the bridgehead around Kemend and Bina began. SS-

Brigadeführer Kumm described the fighting of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 commanded by SS-Obersturmbannführer Bernhard Siebken shortly after it occurred:

When, after a short bombardment by our heavy weapons, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 assaulted Kemend at 0209 hours on 24 February 1945, the attack at first made good progress. While crossing the open plain, they ran into heavy enemy mortar and antitank gun fire. The unexpected bombardment cost a large number of casualties, especially for the lead battalion (I. Bataillon), including the battalion commander and his adjutant. At this critical moment, SS-Obersturmbannführer Siebken hurried to the I. Bataillon and personally took over its command. His appearance at the front and his example of daring pulled every last grenadier forward along with him. Kemendi-psz. was cleared in a fierce struggle and Hill 150 was taken. After we again bombarded Kemend, the first elements, with their commander at the front, pushed into the village from the south and west and wiped out the enemy in fierce house-to-house fighting.<sup>18</sup>

The Gran bridges were also able to be destroyed. The German losses were irreplaceable. Among others, the veteran commander of the 9. (Pi.)/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmführer Dieter Kohler, and a platoon leader of the 11. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Kuno Balz, were wounded (19 Feb.). Balz only went to hospital after an order from Diefenthal, however. SS-Obersturmführer Wilhelm Kowallik, who until then had seen no front line service, took over the 9. (gep.) Kompanie. As a result of this fighting, the Soviet Gran Bridgehead was defeated. In spite of the victory against the Soviet Gran Bridgehead, it must not be overlooked that straightening the front there was fundamentally only a local victory along Army Group South's front.

The Soviets were by then aware of the presence of the Leibstandarte and the I. SS-Panzer-Korps, as well as the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee. After the first surprise, it was then clear to the enemy that after the fighting on the Gran was over, they could expect another attack by the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee. When the Leibstandarte was moved into the area south of the Danube, the Soviet command could prepare for a planned offensive from the Stuhlweißenburg area. The Russians used what time they had left to construct a deep defense in the sectors where the attack was expected and bring in reserves. The carefully and heretofore successfully carried out deception plan for unit movements had been wasted.

On 25 February 1945 the Leibstandarte moved into the area north of Komorn. On 25 February 1945 SS-Oberscharführer Erich Strelow of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Unterscharführer Karl Übler of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and SS-Obersturmführer Franz Sievers, commander of the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1, were named in the Honor Roll of the German Army. They had been recommended by Peiper for their actions during the Ardennes Offensive and were awarded the Honor Roll Clasp. SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff also received this award for his actions as commander of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 at Tilly in Normandy. He wrote his wife Helga:

But I can also give you some pleasant news. About 14 days ago, I was named in the Honor Roll and I was awarded the Golden Honor Roll Clasp. I don't know if you have ever seen this decoration. It is somewhat rare, but not a cheap one, and I received it for my actions in Normandy. It is a golden swastika surrounded

by a golden wreath of oak leaves, some two centimeters in diameter. It is to be worn on the ribbon of the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.<sup>20</sup>

SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke relieved his adjutant SS-Untersturmführer Walter Schoof and had him transferred as an assistant driver for a fuel truck in the supply company's fuel column. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser, who had already occupied this position in the Ardennes, became the new adjutant. Poetschke reported to Peiper and went on a short leave to visit his wife at Knittelfeld in Steiermark (Austria). The Panzer regiment was entrained at Komorn and moved to the Veszprèm (Lake Balaton) area. The staff of the I. Abteilung, with the radio net control station and medical unit, went by motor march to Veszprèm, where the quartering areas for the individual companies were designated. SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke arrived there on 1 March 1945.<sup>21</sup>

During this period the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 assembled at a football field in Veszprèm. The senior company commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Hans Malkomes, presented the battalion to the commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke. After that Jochen Peiper presented Iron Crosses to deserving tankers who had distinguished themselves in the Gran Bridgehead operation.<sup>22</sup> Jochen Peiper recommended SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke for the award of the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross on 26 February 1945. His recent exploits were described along with the actions already cited during the attack on Stoumont in the Ardennes on 19 December 1944:

During the fighting for the Gran Bridgehead SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke once again made a decisive contribution to the success and victory of the division's Panzergruppe. At the head of his battalion, he led the advance in smashing the enemy barricades with considerable aggressiveness and a rare élan and mastered numerous critical situations by his unshakable bravery and imperturbability. His dash and courage have been an example and support for the men of his battalion and even for every member of the Panzergruppe ...

In the fighting for the remnants of the bridgehead, SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke led his Panzergruppe in bitter night fighting for Köhid-Gyarma on 21 February 1945 and for Kemend on 24 February 1945 to a splendid victory which was decisive for the further course of the entire attack.

In the fighting for the Gran bridgehead from 17 to 24 February 1945 his battalion accomplished the following: 25 T-34's destroyed, 182 guns of all kinds – including 164 heavy antitank guns destroyed or captured – 8 antitank rifles destroyed, 55 trucks destroyed, 32 horse-drawn vehicles destroyed, 280 verified enemy killed, 30 armored fighting vehicles captured (Hungarian, Italian, English, and German models).<sup>23</sup>

#### Operation "Awakening Spring" – The Lake Balaton Offensive: 6 to 14 March 1945

The Lake Balaton Offensive, conceived during Operation "South Wind," had the recovery of the Drau – Danube sector as its objective in order to secure the Nagy Kamisza oil region and at the same time establish bridgeheads on the Danube as jump-off points for future operations. The 6. SS-Panzer-Armee was to attack to the south between Lake Balaton and the Sárviz Canal and take the Fünfkirchen highlands. Armeegruppe Balck was to advance to the northeast between the Sárviz Canal and Lake Velencz with the III. Panzer-Korps and block the narrows

between the Danube and Lake Velencz along the line Adony – Kisvelencze. Once infantry forces reached this line, the III. Panzer-Korps was to swing to the south and cover the long flank of the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee between the Sárviz Canal and the Danube and occupy the Danube crossing points. The strong Soviet forces north of Stuhlweißenburg were not considered, however, and they could become a serious danger in the rear of the German offensive.

The behavior of the Soviet troops towards the Hungarian civilian population was horrifying. It was experienced by German units and seen with their own eyes in those villages which the Soviets had occupied and which were liberated by them. SS-Obersturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen, the commander of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 which had been attached to the Panzer regiment, wrote during this period:

These are hard times, but I firmly believe that we will come out on top. After all, everything can't have been done for nothing and the world submerge in a Jewish-Bolshevik chaos. It is hard, very hard, and once it's all over then we will all collapse like an empty sausage skin. But we must and will hold out even if we all have to limp into the last attack on crutches.

When you see and hear how the Russians wreak havoc, then a cold shiver goes down your spine and you're filled with a deep, hot hatred for this brood from hell and a desire to wipe them off the face of the earth.

We'll never be able to forget it; it's ghastly. This is really the final phase of the war and will decide it. Almighty God will grant us the victory for which we have fought for so long. We are unimaginably tired and would be grateful for a victorious peace, but there will be no slack until victory is ours.\(^1\)

On 1 March 1945 the Leibstandarte's vehicles made their torturous way through the mud into their ready positions. The tanks and SPW were transported as far as Veszprém by train. The division had occupied its positions north of Veszprém by the evening of 2 March 1945. On 6 March 1945 the tank strength was indicated at 26 Panthers and 14 Panzer IV's; there were fewer Tigers. On 6 March 1945 the Leibstandarte left the ready positions at Polgardi, assembling to attack south. Jochen Peiper's Panzer regiment rolled south towards Kisláng but, after two kilometers, bogged down in the mud west of Hill 149. The division's attack gained ground with difficulty. SS-Únterscharführer Ewald Claus, platoon leader in the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1, which had been attached to Peiper, described it:

On 6 March 1945 the Panzergruppe thrust westwards through the Russian positions at Soponya. Only a narrow gap had been cleared through the Russian minefields. After passing through the minefields, we reached open country. The tanks could then advance on a broad front. Late in the afternoon the Panzergruppe reached a slight rise, on which it took up a hedgehog position. Outposts were set up. My SPW had a 2 cm triple-barreled Flak with a shield. You could fire either with the center barrel or with both side barrels. The ammunition was put in belts like a machine gun.<sup>2</sup>

That night SS-Brigadeführer Otto Kumm regrouped and formed an assault group out of elements of the Panzergruppe and the two Panzergrenadier regiments. On the following day, 7 March 1945, it broke through a Pakfront, and then the tanks moved through a muddy depression west of Káloz prior to reaching it. At Káloz SS-Rottenführer Kurt Wiemann's SPW with a 7.5 cm cannon of the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was

destroyed and Wiemann was killed. The Russians fled. Peiper then launched his tanks to the north in an attack on Soponya and by evening had been able to push the Russians out and advance as far as the castle park. SS-Unterscharführer Ewald Claus participated in this attack in the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 under SS-Obersturmführer Sievers:

In the morning the Panzergruppe was ordered to attack Káloz, which lay some three kilometers to our front on the left. We headed for the village at top speed. We kept our SPW a bit behind the tanks, as we had to be on the lookout for antitank gun and tank fire. The tanks pushed right through the village, destroying every nest of resistance in their path. Even the antitank guns were eliminated. After about an hour the uproar was over. During the attack, two or three tanks had bogged down in the morass in front of the village. With difficulty, they were pulled out by tank retrievers. That's how we spent the morning. Then we went down the road from Káloz to Soponya in column. The 3. (gep.) Pionier-Kompanie was about 300 meters behind the lead armored elements.

Two tanks hit mines on the south edge of the village. Once more, it was: "Engineers up front!" The company commander, Obersturmführer Sievers, ordered me to go up forward with a squad of combat engineers. The two tanks didn't look too good. I reported to Obersturmbannführer Peiper, who was swearing like a drill instructor. Then he ordered: "Clear the mines quickly, and I'll have your hide if you miss one!"

The mines had just been laid and were easy to find. After a half hour we had cleared a lane about 20 meters wide. Then, on Peiper's orders, we had to advance on foot in front of the tanks and keep an eye out for mines. In this way we marched into Soponya, the combat engineers in front, spread across the road. Soponya was a long, extended village. We weren't really happy to go unprotected in front of the tanks in this way. There were considerable spaces between the houses.

After we were unable to capture a Russian who ran away around the corner of a house, we suddenly heard engine noise. A Russian truck came out of a side street. Before they could recover from their surprise, we took the five men in it prisoner. We confiscated the truck for our company. I took a Russian submachine gun for myself which had belonged to one of the soldiers, and I was better armed than I had been before. By the time we reached the exit to the village, darkness had fallen.

Behind the last house traffic was blocked by a blown-up bridge. There was a antitank gun in the garden pointing in the opposite direction. I dismounted the sight and put it in my pocket. Obersturmbannführer Peiper called for the leader of the combat engineers and I reported to him. He explained to me that the Panzergruppe had rolled over the Russian position from the rear. A few days ago an attack had been mounted from in front – a tank destroyer battalion – two of the vehicles had run into mines 200 meters in front of the village. He ordered me to go back to the company commander and tell him to get the engineer company forward as quickly as possible. The road to the destroyed bridge had to be trafficable and, additionally, the mines had to be cleared ... In spite of the darkness, we cleared the mines and, during the night, the bridging equipment also came up. There were about eight meters to cover.<sup>3</sup>

The III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 had attacked Soponya from the northwest. On 8 March 1945 the division resumed its attack to the south, and the Kampfgruppe of SS-

Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Obersturmbannführer Siebken took Nagyhörcsök-puszta after eliminating an antitank gun position. The I. Bataillon, which had pushed into Nagyhörcsök from the southwest, captured the bridge over the Maldom-Cs. in a bold attack. At that point Siebken had immediately led his battalion across that bridge and, wheeling to the right, smashed through and rolled up the antitank gun barrier south and southwest of Nagyhörcsök in fierce fighting. For this action, and for his successes in the Gran bridgehead, he was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 17 April 1945.<sup>4</sup> On 20 January 1949, the English hanged him in Hameln.<sup>5</sup>

The Panzergruppe followed Siebken's regiment and reached the highlands north of Nagyhörcsök. SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck's 6. Panzer-Kompanie attacked through Hatwannpuszta and Pusztaegres. "The Russian resistance stiffened northwest of Nagyhörcsök. The entire afternoon was one long gun duel between tank and antitank gun," wrote Ewald Claus.<sup>6</sup>

On 9 March 1945 Peiper launched an attack south on Simontornya and, in a rapid advance, reached the heights around János mjr. His tanks ran into a Soviet Pakfront there and into artillery fire from the south bank of the Sió. In the afternoon Peiper's Kampfgruppe moved toward Simontornya and finally took up a defensive position in front of the village. The description of this armor battle day for the 6. Kompanie ran: "Security and defense against enemy tank and infantry attacks north of Simontornya." SS-Unterscharführer Claus experienced Peiper's armor attack in the following manner:

Once again it was: "Engineers up front!" But this time in the SPW. I was ordered by the company commander, Obersturmführer Sievers, to take the lead in my platoon. We headed into the darkness toward the enemy along a field path. The tanks moved in column behind us. After traveling for about two hours, it gradually grew light. Up to that point, we had had no enemy contact ... We had reached a slight rise. Behind it the terrain dropped at first gently, then more steeply.

There were a few people jumping around at an isolated farm, about 500 meters away. Suddenly we received antitank gun fire from there. I ordered the driver, Eichler: "Move out; give it all it's got!" We raced down the slope toward the house. Suddenly we saw the antitank gun. My driver headed directly for it. First he rolled over a heavy machine gun and then stopped beside the antitank gun two meters away. I gave it a round from our triplebarreled Flak to render it harmless. Suddenly there was a scream next to me. One of my men dropped forward, hit. He was able to point to our rear before collapsing. Ten meters behind us stood the Russians, man after man in a trench. We were alone, as the other SPW hadn't followed. Although we had driven over the trench earlier, we were only paying attention to the antitank gun and had overlooked the infantry position. At first nobody fired. My driver had driven behind a bush and from there we could see the beginning of the trench. Then the fireworks began.

I simply aimed the triple-barreled Flak into the trench. The Russians fired in the air. Suddenly I had a jam. With a lot of luck I was able to clear it rapidly. I could see a Russian officer who, pistol in hand, was trying to keep his men from running. In the meantime another SPW had arrived which fired at the officer. The remaining Russians gave up and were captured. We sent them back without escort as we had no one to spare. Our main concern was for our wounded man, a bullet through the lungs. We trans-

ferred him to a medical SPW which had just arrived. We knew that he was in good hands.<sup>7</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer von Tritschler of the 2. Panzer-Kompanie was killed in action and the Panther of veteran platoon leader, SS-Hauptscharführer Knappich, was hit. Knappich was wounded in the head. He went back to the aid station on foot and has been missing ever since. An assault group made up of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1, SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 and SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 followed through Sáregres where it ran into a Soviet antitank gun barrier. The advances of the Panzer regiment of the Leibstandarte in Hungary were accompanied by ever-present mud, deep soil and minefields. In spite of these obstacles, they once again resembled tank attacks in the classic style, which had been completely out of the question for Peiper in Normandy and in the Ardennes. The Tigers, Panthers and Panzer IV's rolled forward in line and wedge formations, along with the armored "Wirbelwind" Flak with its quadruple 2 cm cannon and the armored "Ostwind" Flak with its 3.7 cm single barreled cannon. They were followed by the SPW of the SPW-Bataillon. SS-Oberscharführer Kurt Fickert, leader of the "Wirbelwind" Flak platoon of the 4./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, reported:

We went in open formation behind the Tigers and Panthers in order to suppress enemy infantry. I had been assigned by Peiper to support our infantry in house-to-house fighting. A few Panthers followed us, which were to take care of any enemy tanks which showed up. Two of Obersturmführer Vögler's quad Flak were also attached to me. Most of the Tiger II's had dropped out of action because of differential problems. Peiper had forbidden us to shoot at aircraft. Our light infantry could take care of itself, and we had to save our ammunition for ground combat.<sup>8</sup>

Until then, the Soviets hadn't used their tanks for massive counterattacks. On 10 March 1945 the Leibstandarte's two assault groups resumed their attacks on the Soviet bridgeheads at Simontornya and Sáregres, where the Russian resistance had increased considerably. When the Panzergruppe pushed into a village during this fighting, the escorting Panzergrenadiere of the 7./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 were unable to follow immediately behind them, so that Soviet teams of close-in tank fighters became a danger to German tanks. Shortly after the 7. Kompanie arrived in the village, Peiper, already in the center of the village, called the company commander, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Kübler, on the carpet and informed him that he would recommend that he be court-martialed for negligence in helping during the fight for the village.9 Kübler was shocked. On 10 March 1945 he was killed in action in front of Sáregres. The commander of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, fought there at the focal point of the action:

We had to continuously repel Russian tank and infantry attacks. Our reconnaissance in force revealed that Simontornya was imbedded in a depression. A covered approach to the village was not possible. Moreover, the village was very strongly defended with antitank and antiaircraft gun positions. We had to make it across an open field of some 500 to 700 meters, sloping gently to the south, in order to approach the village. It was not possible to stop and fire on the forward slope of this field. Several times we tried to get to Simontornya on defiles. This didn't work out for us because the first tank which approached a defile was knocked out. That's what also happened to me when I tried it.<sup>10</sup>

The Panzergruppe had 23 tanks in action, 41 were in for repairs,

as were ten Tigers. On 11 March 1945 the elements of the Leibstandarte attacking Simontornya were greeted by an energetic defense, strong artillery fire and waves of ground support aircraft attacks. With SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 26, attached from the "Hitlerjugend" Division, the Leibstandarte's infantry elements succeeded in storming the bitterly defended fork in the roads north of Simontornya. On the previous day, 10 March, neither the commander of the 6. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, as already mentioned, nor the platoon leader of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Konrad Heubeck, were able to cross the sloping open area in front of Simontornya in a rapid assault.

On 11 March 1945 SS-Untersturmführer Hermann Gerdes of the 2. Panzer-Kompanie tried another assault on Simontornya. In the evening twilight, he successfully took three Panthers on a wild ride across the plain. In spite of losing two Panthers to the Soviet defensive fire, Gerdes continued his movement into the town and entirely alone pushed his Panther all the way up to the bridge across the Sió. But he was unable to prevent it from being blown up. The Soviets made numerous attempts to destroy his tank in close combat, but Gerdes and his crew were able to push back every attack. He reported his location and situation by radio to Poetschke and urgently requested reinforcement. It was a critical night. As early morning dawned on 12 March 1945, the 6. Panzer-Kompanie attacked Simontornya. Its company commander, SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, wrote:

Attack on Simontornya. Coming up and over the reverse slope, we crossed the open, unprotected and sloping plain in a hellish charge, and reached the western edge of the village without stopping to fire. From this point, we attacked through the village to the east and south. The fight for the village was intense and short. Simontornya was firmly in our hands. During this attack we lost three tanks on the open plain and two more in the village. The enemy had no time to move his antitank positions and Flak, so that we were able to either capture or destroy them.<sup>11</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer Werner Aschendorff, platoon leader in SS-Obersturmführer Preuß' 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was killed during the fighting in Simontornya which was waged with considerable ferocity by both sides. His men buried him in Tabonya. Engineers managed to cross the Sió Canal in assault boats and, after that, SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 and SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 22 "Hitlerjugend" were able to take the ridge and Hill 220 on the south bank of the Sió. On the afternoon of 12 March SS-Untersturmführer Hermann Gerdes, with his tank and crew, went to the command post of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Jánosháza and reported back to Peiper and Poetschke, healthy but with weak knees and tired. Gerdes was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class by Peiper and his crew received the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.

On 13 March 1945 the weather finally improved, and six degrees above zero allowed the mud-choked roads to dry out a bit. The engineers began to bridge the Sió Canal while under fire from artillery and ground support fighters and, by evening, it was finished. On 14 March 1945 the temperature climbed to 13 degrees, which allowed the roads to improve some more. The Soviets attacked advancing German troops with continuous waves of ground-support aircraft. In the afternoon a German attack expanded the bridgehead up to Hill 115, two kilometers southeast of Simontornya.

SS-Oberscharführer Kurt Fickert, leader of the "Wirbelwind"

Flak platoon of the 4./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, fought in Simontornya with his Flak tanks: "We had to halt at a bridge and clear the way for Panthers. We were taking heavy antitank gun fire from the slopes of the vineyards. The gun commander of a quadruple Flak attached to my unit was severely wounded and a Rottenführer was killed. Unterscharführer Gottlob Braun, a gun commander of mine, was also wounded." <sup>12</sup>

Two tanks covered the newly repaired bridge. A Kampfgruppe consisting of Jagdpanzer IV's and SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 - together with the 23. Panzer-Division which attacked from Sáregres - pushed the Soviet bridgehead across the Sárviz Canal in front of Czecze back across its banks. Far from this area of fighting, in the north, considerable enemy reinforcement were detected facing the front lines of the IV. SS-Panzer-Korps in the Stuhlweißenburg – Zámoly area. Without any doubt, Heeresgruppe South had located a major Soviet Offensive in preparation behind the German front. In view of this threat, the question was asked as to whether the German offensive on the Sió should be halted immediately, in order to use the forces freed in this way against the approaching major Soviet offensive. That was Sepp Dietrich's suggestion. On the other hand, the question was raised whether the German attack could be brought back into motion by regrouping.

On 14 March 1945 SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 were pulled out of the front lines and moved into the Dég area. Eight Tigers were in action with schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, 24 were being repaired. 13 A few tanks were supposed to have been shifted to Inota further to the north already.14 The command post of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was located at Jánosháza, where most of the operational tanks were also to be found. SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke was presented with the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross on 15 March 1945 at Jánosháza. To celebrate this event, the battalion clerk had made an oversized Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves out of cardboard, which was presented to Poetschke. SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor of the Waffen-SS Otto Kumm presented the Oak Leaves to Poetschke at Jánosháza and Jochen Peiper gave a short speech in front of the assembled officers. Finally, a number of the Panzer regiment's officers socialized for a long time with Peiper, Poetschke and the divisional commander. 15 For his actions on 19 December 1944 at the attack on Stoumont in the Ardennes, Poetschke had been named in the Honor Roll of the German Army on 5 March 1945 and decorated with the Honor Roll Clasp. With the Knight's Cross and Oak Leaves, the German Cross in Gold, the Gold Wound Medal, the Honor Roll Clasp, the Nahkampfspange in Bronze, and the 2nd level of the Panzerkampfabzeichen for 25 actions, among other awards, SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke was one of the most highly decorated soldiers in the Panzer regiment of the Leibstandarte.

SS-Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich requested that Heeresgruppe South pull back his 6. Panzer-Armee to prevent the divisions fighting between Lake Balaton and Lake Velencze from being cut off, as it was known that the Soviet's intended to attack Stuhlweißenburg though Várpolata – Veszprém. That night orders were issued to the I. SS-Panzer-Korps to prepare for immediate pull back of the corps with the Leibstandarte and "Hitlerjugend" Divisions, whereupon the fronts of the I. Kavallerie-Korps and the 23. Panzer-Division were to be extended.

# Fighting Withdrawal in Hungary: 18 March to 1 April 1945

On 16 March 1945 the Soviet offensive began between Lake Velencze and Bicske in the sector of the IV. SS-Panzer-Korps. The 3rd Ukrainian Front struck along a stretch between Tatabánya and Stuhlweißenburg. The Russians were soon approaching Komorn. They had split General Balck's 6. Armee between the 3. SS-Panzer-Division "Totenkopf" and the 2nd Hungarian Panzer-Division. The news of the major Soviet offensive at operational level forced Generaloberst Guderian to request the immediate shift of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps to the north, as Sepp Dietrich had suggested. After several requests, Heeresgruppe South received Hitler's approval for the movement of the I. SS-Panzer-Korps at 0140 hours on 18 March 1945. It was to carry out a flanking counterattack from the Várpolata area toward Zámoly to cut off the spearhead units of the Russian attack. This grand shifting of positions began during the night of 18 March 1945 – the way back north for the Leibstandarte.

The bridge in Simontornya collapsed under a tank, which delayed the move. The division's march out of the Simontornya Bridgehead took it to the north and it reached Dég - Enying by 1800 hours. Panzergruppe Peiper had only 16 operational tanks (without Tigers) and 38 undergoing repair. During the night of 17/18 March it left Jánosháza, where it had been since 14 March 1945. It moved along the overcrowded roads via Igar -Mezösilas - Dég - Enying to Lepsény, where it spent the night. During the night of 18/19 March 1945, its march continued along roads clogged with refugees and German supply elements via Küngös – Berhida – Pétfürdö – Várpalota. Towards noon on 19 March 1945 it reached its assigned area east of Inota. The commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Jupp Diefenthal, remembered: "Very hard house-to-house fighting. We dismounted and cleared the place, taking heavy casualties. Put out security east of Inota. Individual assault units were successfully repulsed. Enemy movement to the north of Inota."2

Towards 1600 hours Jochen Peiper and SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke established their command posts at Inota. The enemy situation was still completely unclear so Poetschke, his adjutant Reiser and SS-Obersturmführer Wolff carried out a reconnaissance to the north and east with their Panthers. As the Regiment's tanks arrived during the night, they immediately took up covering positions. Already that night, the Soviets attacked. On 20 March 1945 the Leibstandarte was hit by the full fury of the 6th Guards Tank Army and the 4th Guards Army as they attacked. An attack by the Germans on Csór and the high ground lying three kilometers northeast of Inota bogged down in a Soviet barrage. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser:

The enemy attacked early, even before we could assemble for our own attack. By 0400 hours their infantry forces were already attacking in waves. The attack was massively supported by 40 enemy tanks, which advanced on both sides of the Inota – Stuhlweißenburg road and north of the railroad line at Réti psz. The bitter tank battle against the enemy forces, which far outnumbered us and which were attacking from all sides, lasted for the entire day. In this sector 19 enemy tanks were destroyed by the 7. Panzer-Kompanie. Unterscharführer Clotten alone reported seven kills.

The 1. Kompanie of Obersturmführer Wolff was covering north of Inota. In the thickly forested terrain the enemy – bypassing our

strongpoints – seemed to be advancing to the west. For the moment, he wasn't yet attacking our outposts. During the afternoon the enemy attacks were supported by ground-attack aircraft, which bombed Inota, set it on fire and strafed our tanks. Obersturmführer Sternebeck reported by radio that the enemy had brought up new tanks and had apparently taken Réti psz. in the neighboring sector. Enemy pressure on Inota now increased from that direction.

At the same time, Obersturmführer Wolff also reported infantry and tank attacks in his sector. Ivan managed to break into the village there ... As darkness fell, the situation reached a dramatic climax, as the enemy infantry infiltrated past our tanks and threatened us in the command post. Sturmbannführer Poetschke decided to give up Inota and gave orders to disengage from the enemy and pull back toward Várpolata.<sup>3</sup>

In the late afternoon the commander of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie, SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Werner Wolff, headed west toward Várpolata with six Panthers. He came to a halt some two kilometers before Inota to instruct the commanders. Then he stood straight up in the turret, his belt line even with the hatch, to launch the attack by giving the usual signal for the tanks to advance, the right fist up in the air. At that moment, a mortar round exploded immediately next to Wolff's tank on the right. Wolff screamed and fell inside his tank. The other tank commanders, who had been watching their commander, were paralyzed with horror. Wolff's tank moved back immediately and the other tanks broke off the attack.<sup>4</sup> Jochen Peiper wrote that Wolff was

... wounded at Inota, and it was a tiny piece of shrapnel which went directly up the nasal passage without any exterior manifestations. As we all did, he had his head outside the turret. The situation wasn't particularly critical. It was only a matter of driving off some T-34's which had gotten fresh and which were zooming around behind the command post. They fired with high explosive rounds from which the shrapnel effect stemmed. The regimental surgeon Sickel was immediately on the spot. His report to me stated: Wolff put out of action by a head wound, unconscious, pulse good. Brain damage made his recovery uncertain. I immediately ordered the wounded man to be taken to our main aid station in Veszprém as quickly as possible and ordered that his gunner not leave his side and pass on regular reports of his condition. It was planned to evacuate him from Veszprém immediately back to Germany by air. But then we lost all contact with him.<sup>5</sup>

For a long time Werner Wolff was counted as missing, especially as the gunner, Heinrich Kahlen, hadn't accompanied him as Peiper had arranged. That day Wolff was in a different Panther, as his "101" had hit a mine during the move to Inota and was undergoing repairs. Lengthy research finally revealed that Wolff had been brought to the aid station by his crew and placed in a medical SPW there. At that time a shell hit, killing two men and wounding the regimental surgeon, Dr. Kurt Sickel. The battalion medical noncommissioned officer in charge, SS-Hauptscharführer Jakob Aichele, then took Wolff and Sickel into Várpolata, some three kilometers away, where the Leibstandarte's ambulance platoon was located. From there, Wolff, Sickel, and six other wounded were transported to the main aid station at Veszprém, where they arrived at about 2300 hours.

Dr. Sickel personally handed Wolff over to the care of the director of the main aid station who promised him, in spite of the

continuous flow of wounded coming in, that he would do everything in his power to get Wolff evacuated further back. Air evacuation, which was a frequent form of evacuation for head wounds, was also considered. One of Wolff's crew was with him in Veszpém, but it is unknown who he was. In any case, it wasn't his gunner Kahlen. In the early morning hours of 21 March 1945, Wolff was picked up by the staff medical noncommissioned officer in charge, Heinrich Löwenstein, and brought to the Leibstandarte's main aid station, where he was operated on. Peiper recalled that Wolff was not fit for air transport and was only transferred to Götzendorf an der Leitha shortly before the main aid station was moved back into Germany. Werner Wolff died there at the base reserve hospital on 30 March 1945. He was buried in the memorial cemetery in front of the base. His wife wrote:

He seemed to be certain that he would be killed in action. And no one, as he wished, could say anything more comforting to me than he himself. What he wanted more than anything else was to know that we would have a child. From his last letter in the field, which he wrote on 15 March 1945, it appeared that he had just received the news that he would become a father.

Werner Wolff was Peiper's favorite pupil. The young man from Memel had been his adjutant in the SPW-Bataillon in 1943 and, along with Paul Guhl, the only officer from that battalion who Peiper later had transferred to the Panzer regiment. Peiper wrote about the Knight's Cross recipient: "Werner Wolff had a short career like a comet. He shot up in glory, only to sink back into the darkness just as quickly."

On this 20 March 1945 SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck, with six Panzer IV's from the 6. Kompanie, together with SS-Obersturmführer Wessel and his two Tiger II's from the 1./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, found themselves east of Inota. They boldly carried out an attack which stopped the enemy forces pushing towards Veszprém. In the afternoon it became apparent that the group, which had lost all radio contact with Peiper and Poetschke, was being outflanked. In the evening Sternebeck could see that Inota was burning and was being shelled by German artillery. That meant Inota was occupied by the enemy.

Before midnight, on the night of 20/21 March, we decided to break through Inota. Organization: one King Tiger, then six Panzer IV's and a King Tiger to bring up the rear. Taking advantage of the dark and another barrage, we reached the east edge of the village. At first the Russians assumed we were theirs, but then we were identified. The darkness and the crooked road saved us. We raced through the village at top speed. Almost at the west outskirts of the village our lead Tiger had to destroy a few T-34's, so that we could get out of Inota undamaged. When we reached Várpolata, where we ran into the rest of the regiment, there was almost a tragedy. Our elements in Várpolata expected only the enemy from the east, not us. Only thanks to our flares were we saved from being fired on by our comrades. Poetschke told me that night they had written off the rest of the 6. Kompanie and the two King Tigers once we had lost radio contact and Inota was taken by the enemy. Once again, at the last second, luck was on our side.9

This day of tank fighting was described in the company soldiers' pay books as: "Covering actions and defense against enemy tank attacks east and north of Inota" <sup>10</sup> The veteran and beloved commander of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 (attached to Peiper), SS-Obersturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen, was transferred into the officer reserve. That decision was received in

the battalion with incomprehension. SS-Sturmbannführer and Knight's Cross winner Heinz Kling, who had formerly commanded the 13. Kompanie in the Panzer regiment before it was used to build the corps Tiger Battalion, assumed command of the battalion from him. Von Westernhagen went to the command post to report to SS-Brigadeführer Kumm. There was an officer there who was a friend, and who later wrote to von Westernhagen's wife who was almost due: "We were waiting for him at the divisional command post in a farm house on the road. He drove up. I knew that it had to be Hein, and went to the door. At this moment a small bomb fell from a single Russian aircraft on the house. When I got outside my Hein lay at the house entrance, fatally wounded." <sup>11</sup>

A piece of shrapnel from the bomb penetrated the scar from the head wound he received in 1943 and killed him immediately. At the divisional command post Sepp Dietrich had just presented the Swords to the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross to SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor of the Waffen-SS Otto Kumm. He received them for his command of the "Prinz Eugen" Division. Kumm wrote: "Unfortunately, I scarcely knew my comrade Heinz von Westernhagen. I am sorry because he was coming to see me when it happened. He wasn't on the way to the corps' command post, but right at the door of the house when the bombs hit. He was killed immediately. Sepp Dietrich, Hermann Prieß, Jochen Peiper and I were present." 13

On 21 March 1945 Várpalota was at the focal point of the Panzer regiment's fighting. Harri Berger of SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 wrote:

The 2. Kompanie held a rapidly set up blocking position at Várpalota against a closely pursuing enemy force. We were entrenched on a railway embankment. An oil refinery was on fire to our right and the Russians had been attacking our position without letup since morning. We lost considerable casualties to artillery and the Stalin organs.<sup>14</sup>

The Leibstandarte's tank crews and Panzergrenadiere fought with incredible ferocity against the Soviet's continuous mass attacks. In the light of the burning oil refinery, SS-Unterscharführer Eduard Stadler of the 2./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 destroyed 12 Soviet tanks with his King Tiger and was decorated with the Iron Cross, 1st Class by SS-Sturmbannführer Kling. He was one of the former Luftwaffe soldiers who had been transferred to the Leibstandarte in Kharkov. The Austrian Tiger commander wore both Iron Crosses, the Luftwaffe Ground Combat Badge, Infantry Assault Badge, Panzerkampfabzeichen and the Wound Badge. 15 During that night Poetschke went to Peiper to get information on the situation at the regimental command post. In the meantime, it had become obvious that the division had been transferred from Simontornya to Inota too late to be able to hold any cohesive front against the Soviet breakthrough north of Stuhlweißenburg. It had already been broken through in places by the Russians spearheads.

In the morning of 21 March 1945 SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor of the Waffen-SS Otto Kumm was with Peiper on the east edge of Várpolata, who pointed out a Russian tank approach of some 70 tanks to him. The enemy tanks attacked Vápolata from the northeast and pushed into the industrial area, where they lost three tanks. Soon afterwards new Russian tanks were in the area of the railroad station. In individual combat, tank against tank, the German tank commanders came out on top and destroyed seven tanks in the south part of Várpolata for three

losses of their own. SS-Untersturmführer Konrad Heubeck, who commanded the 1. Kompanie after Wolff had been wounded, destroyed 11 "Stalin" tanks in Várpolata. The enemy was in the northern part of the city. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser fought as a Panther commander in Várpolata:

There were shots all over the place. Ivan was suddenly everywhere and it seemed pointless to get involved in close combat or house-to-house fighting against such superior numbers. We moved the command post outside the city into a weekend house north of the highway. From there we reestablished radio contact with the regiment. And then we were able to get the latest: We were ordered to cover the highway on the crossroads at Öskü and Hajmáskér immediately. The enemy had pushed past us north of Válrpolata! Untersturmführer Heubeck immediately set out with two Panthers to support Hauptsturmführer Birnschein (author: 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501). Hauptsturmführer Malkomes – 2. Panzer-Kompanie – arrived at the command post at around 1500 hours in order to report the increasingly difficult situation in Várpolata. According to his judgement, the city could not be held through the night. Lacking infantry forces of our own, our tanks were unable to match the enemy in close combat or house-to-house fighting.

Hauptsturmführer Malkomes left with orders to hold out whatever it cost until dark and then to pull back. Barely 30 minutes later, Malkomes' tank returned to the command post at high speed. Malkomes had been killed by a head wound and was sitting dead in the turret of his tank. Sturmbannführer Poetschke then climbed into the tank to pull our last tanks which were still fighting in Várpolata out of that chaos. I headed for Öskü.

The road was already under direct fire and was blocked by burning vehicles. There were a few barracks in a patch of woods north of Pétfürdö, and I set up a temporary command post there. A runner was sent out to get gasoline and ammunition. Birnschein and Heubeck reported by radio: "Enemy tank column moving along the parallel running Öskü – Hajmáskér road towards Veszprém; initiating action." Within two hours 17 enemy tanks were destroyed.

Várpolata was given up between 1800 and 1900 hours; the city was lost in costly urban combat. Our few remaining tanks, of which some were only conditionally operational, took up covering positions during the night in the area of the railway line northwest of Pétfürdö – Öskü.<sup>17</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer Konrad Heubeck, who had destroyed his 52nd tank during his tank engagement on the highway, was recommended for the Knight's Cross. A platoon leader in the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, SS-Untersturmführer Günther Borchers, wrote in his diary:

I was ordered by Obersturmbannführer Peiper to take my vehicle and scout to the east north of the highway. Immediately past Várpolata, I took tank fire from the southeast. I drove through a Luftwaffe Flak position. They hadn't seen anything. OK, keep going. After about 1000 meters I was fired on from behind. Our Flak was shooting at me. One flare was enough to get them to stop. There were also now Russian tanks in the area. There were about 20. SS-Hauptsturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Malkomes was coming up behind me. Thirteen T-34's were knocked out; he himself was killed by a round in the head. We had to pull back. Enemy tanks had also broken through south of the highway again. My other eye also became inflamed and I

could hardly see.19

When SS-Hauptsturmführer Malkomes was killed, an extraordinarily able commander was lost. He lived for his 2. Kompanie and was a brave and aggressive leader for it. For his actions on the Eastern Front in 1943, the 31-year-old soldier from Bremen was awarded the German Cross in Gold in June 1944. For his actions in Normandy he was awarded the Knight's Cross in October 1944. Both Peiper and Poetschke valued him highly. Poetschke was shattered by his death.<sup>20</sup>

The SPW-Bataillon formed the rear guard between Inota and Várpolata. The commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Diefenthal, reported:

In the evening the divisional commander personally gave the orders to withdraw because Várpolata had been occupied by the enemy. Várpolata was burning like a bonfire. Withdrawal to Öskü south of Várpolata. Also occupied by the enemy. It would seem that the Russians had surrounded us. The route of the withdrawal toward Veszprém was cleared. The III. Bataillon formed the rear guard for the division ...

The battalion was mounted up. It went into position north and south of the road with its remaining intact SPW, in order to engage enemy forces either attacking or flowing past to the left or right. Isolated enemy contact. The battalion held a front 800 meters wide. Communications through unencrypted radio traffic. More than anywhere else, the Russians were overtaking our units in the north as they moved west. Disorganized German Army units were pulling back on the Veszprém – Devecser road.<sup>21</sup>

On that day, the Tiger Battalion commander, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen, was buried in Veszprém in the presence of some of the officers, noncommissioned officers and men of his battalion. His constant friend, Jochen Peiper, spoke the last words, before the casket sank beneath Hungarian soil to the accompaniment of the volleys of the honor salvos.<sup>22</sup>

On 22 March 1945 the Soviet attack hit the Panzergruppe and elements of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 east of Öskü and separated it from the Kampfgruppe consisting of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 west of Tés. SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke was ordered to open the main road to Veszprém. His adjutant recalled:

The situation early on that day was unclear to us. Radio and other communications back and forth from the Panzergruppe to the regiment and from the regiment to the division didn't work at all. Where was Peiper's command post? Finally we made contact with the regiment and were briefed on the completely unclear situation and were given our orders.

After an enemy tank unit with 40 to 50 tanks had pushed via Hajmáskér to Kádárta – Veszprém, Panzergruppe Poetschke was to swing to the south – via Litér, then wheel to the northwest – get back on the main road, attack the enemy there, open the way to Veszprém and keep it open. Two tanks were left back to cover the Soly – Hajmáskér crossroads. At about 1300 hours we reached Litér by way of Királyszentiván. There we regrouped with five other tanks, among them a Panzer IV with a Luftwaffe Oberleutnant as air liaison officer. The Panzergruppe had a total of 16 tanks. We took on ammunition and a little fuel. Around 1430 hours we left Litér on the road to the northwest. The lead elements reached the fork in the road to the highway. After a short halt we went on toward Veszprém. Riding in the SPW of the sig-

nals officer, SS-Untersturmführer Pönisch, we reached the fork as maybe the seventh vehicle. To the right of the road, to the north, vision was blocked by a small acacia woods about 150 meters away, to the left of the road, a hedge, then gradually rising meadow behind it, and then another patch of woods about 250 meters away. So far still no contact with the enemy.

The tanks rolled on down the highway in staggered formation. There was tremendous tension! Then from the right there were two or three flashes from the acacias, and the hard bark of T-34 cannon could be plainly discerned. I looked back. There an SPW had been hit which had been just turning on to the highway at the junction — it was in flames! The tanks moving along in front of us weren't aware of it. I leaped out and raced forward along the road ditch. Sturmbannführer Poetschke's Panther was three vehicles in front of me and I jumped up on it. At the same moment, our lead tank was hit. Enemy tanks broke out of the acacia woods on the right and out of the patch of woods on the left, taking us in a pincers movement. We had run into a trap, and defended ourselves desperately. Poetschke ordered by radio: "Turn right and pull back!" In this unequal contest we would have been cold meat.

We put down smoke as we slowly withdrew, which was our only hope as we were only 200 meters from the enemy. On the meadow a number of other tanks were hit, the Luftwaffe officer's among them. The Oberleutnant flew out of his Panzer-IV like a burning torch. On foot, I reached the west edge of Litér at the same time as our remaining tanks. We had suffered heavy losses: seven tanks, some SPW, dead and wounded with severe burns. We regrouped at the northwest edge of Litér and took up positions there. We waited to see if Ivan would follow us. He didn't.

I was ordered by Poetschke to find the regimental command post. It was supposed to be somewhere on the edge of the city of Veszprém. I left in a Schwimmwagen. Driving cross country and on farm roads, I reached Veszprém around 2000 hours and found the command post. There I was told that radio contact had been established in the meantime with Poetschke's Panzergruppe. They were on the way to Veszprém and arrived around 2300 hours. Poetschke ordered me to drive back to Litér immediately to pick up the wounded and a tank. There was moonlight and, since I already knew the way, I was quickly back at Litér. There was an uncanny quiet in the village. We left the vehicles and sneaked along the houses and through the gardens up to the farm house where the wounded were being cared for. There was no one there! No trace of the tank. The local people must have fled or hidden.. I drove back and at 0300 hours I was at Veszprém ... 23

Sternebeck's tank crew was given a confirmed tank combat day, described as "Covering Hill 172 and attacking along the highway toward Veszprém north of Litér." <sup>24</sup> The task force which was surrounded at Öskü fought its way free and reached Hajmáskér. Every division in the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee was fighting with the courage of desperation to escape the threat of being surrounded. The Commander-in-Chief of the 6. Armee, General Hermann Balck, sneered at the divisions of the Waffen-SS as they fought for their very lives and mocked them: "... in part faulty leadership, poor reporting practices, and lack of discipline behind the front." This statement by Balck was reported by the Commanderin-Chief of Heeresgruppe South, General Wöhler. These vindictive accusations even reached Adolf Hitler. <sup>25</sup>

After the heavy losses of the previous day, 23 March 1945 would prove to be even worse for the Panzergruppe. SS-

Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser lived through that day:

It was morning, just after 0600 hours. We were heading through Veszprém with nine tanks, the radio SPW, and two Schwimmwagen to take up positions on the edge of the city to the northeast. The city felt almost like it was dead. Now and then we encountered individual vehicles racing through the city. I was driving up front with Sturmbannführer Poetschke in a Schwimmwagen, in order to look over the terrain on the edge of town. The tanks were following. It was a cloudless day and already warm at that early hour. We left the vehicle and went through a garden in order to get an overview of the terrain lying before us.

With the field glasses, we could see a tank column of about 30 to 40 tanks, moving south from Kádárta and approaching Veszprém. Our tanks came up, and Poetschke rapidly brought all the tank commanders together to brief them on the spot. The group of tank commanders was assembled next to a shed by Poetschke. Suddenly there was a massive bombardment of mortar shells right in the middle of them! The consequences were bad. Poetschke was very badly wounded. Untersturmführer Münkemer, Untersturmführer Gerdes and three other tank commanders were also more or less severely wounded, but none of them were fit for action! We did what we could to care for the wounded. In spite of his bad wound, Sturmbannführer Poetschke realized the seriousness of the situation and called to his signals officer, Untersturmführer Pönisch: "Radio Peiper what happened here." Poetschke asked for another pistol, and we carried him away using a door as a stretcher.

In the meantime, the enemy had pushed past Veszprém in the north. The enemy went to Márkó, eight kilometers behind us, to block off the highway. In this situation, the tanks were pulled back without commanders and ordered to Márkó. This was really one of the blackest days in the history of the I. Abteilung or of the Panzer Regiment. A desperate final battle against the red flood had begun only a few days before, and the interim balance was not only shocking, it was also disillusioning. The last battle had begun – the end was in sight.<sup>26</sup>

On this day, the regiment reached its lowest point in personnel. Tank commander SS-Unterscharführer Daniel Meyer of the 1. Panzer-Kompanie experienced the catastrophe of Veszprém as follows:

On 23 March 1945 we arrived at Veszprém at 0800 hours in the morning from Várpalota. At 0915 hours, all tank commanders were ordered to the command post. We got into a SPW with the commander and went to a situation briefing, as 35 enemy tanks had been reported. When we arrived we got out and assembled. There was a Panzer IV about 50 meters in front of us. The commander briefed us as to where the enemy tanks were to be expected and what measures we were to take against them. There were only isolated mortar rounds going off.

Just as the conference ended, and I turned to go to the Panzer IV, there was an explosion in the middle of those still gathered together. In response to screams – I was also wounded – I went back immediately and saw that the commander was among those wounded. Because of my wounded arm, it was not possible for me to bring the Sturmbannführer back with me. I informed him that I would go and bring back an SPW for transport right away. And that's what I did. Together with the SPW driver, we loaded the commander first and then the other wounded. No doctor was available.

We drove back to the command post. I at once asked the doctor there for help, which we got. After bandaging the wounds, the doctor himself drove on to the main aid station. When we arrived, the main aid station had already moved and, in spite of tremendous personal efforts, we were unable to find another main aid station, as they were moving back. On the way, we met Obersturmbannführer Peiper, who immediately took charge of finding transport back by way of aircraft. But we heard nothing more about that. The battalion surgeon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Neumayer, also met up with us and took us to the nearest main aid station.<sup>27</sup>

SS-Untersturmführer Willi Stehle, Hubert Kaufmann, and Heinz Rehagel of the 1., 2., and 7. Kompanien respectively were also severely wounded at Veszprém.28 Dr. Neumayer brought SS-Sturmbannführer Poetschke to a Luftwaffe main aid station where, after examination of the wound, it was determined that both bones in the lower leg were smashed. Poetschke quite energetically rejected the doctor's suggestion that he amputate the lower leg in the middle, and finally Dr. Neumayer had to promise him not to take off the leg. Under anesthetic, the large wound was taken care of and plasma given. After Poetschke returned to consciousness, he asked how long it would take him to recover and when he would he ready to go back into combat. He was only concerned for his leg. Toward evening his condition worsened, his pulse sank, and his mind was clouded. He spoke rarely, now and again, and then only about his leg. He received heart stimulants continuously but his pulse continued to grow weaker. In the early morning hours of 24 March 1945 Werner Poetschke went to sleep forever. It is assumed an embolism occurred that evening which led to a heart attack. Dr. Neumayer is certain that he could have saved Poetschke's life if he had agreed to the amputation of his lower leg. SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Neumayer wrote:

He was unable to bear the thought of amputation. He would have done what he had threatened again and again. He always said: "If I can no longer get in a tank, then life has no more meaning for me. I would rather shoot myself in the head." The way I knew him, he could not have survived the unfortunate conclusion to this war. He had assured me several times that he would never go into captivity alive. I am certain that he meant it, for he always did what he said he would.<sup>29</sup>

The dead Knight's Cross winners Werner Poetschke and Hans Malkomes were taken back to German territory. As a result of their deaths, the structure of the I. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was destroyed. The battalion commander Poetschke, the company commanders Wolff and Malkomes, the platoon leaders Münkemer, Gerdes, Kaufmann, Stehle, Mayer and, earlier, von Tritschler and Knappich and other tank commanders were casualties. The regimental maintenance officer, SS-Obersturmführer Horst Gülden, was killed in a bombing raid at Varoslöd while driving in a column of vehicles. The commander of the Tiger Battalion, von Westernhagen, was likewise killed in action. Jochen Peiper was depressed.

From then on the available Panthers of the 1. and 2. Kompanien were consolidated and commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Ernst Otto, who had previously commanded the regiment's supply company and before that the 4. Kompanie. It was the same for the Panzer IV's which were commanded first by SS-Hauptsturmführer Oskar Klingelhöfer and, starting in April 1945, by SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck.

On 23 March 1945 SS-Unterscharführer Walter Schüle's Panzer IV of the 6. Kompanie was the last to shoot its way out of Veszprém, which was already occupied by the Russians.<sup>30</sup> The division pulled back to Márkó. On 24 March 1945 the Panzer IV's of the 6. and 7. Kompanien were fighting east of Herend and Varoslöd.<sup>31</sup> The intense fighting around Várpalota and Veszprém had considerably reduced the Leibstandarte's fighting strength. The regiments and battalions were only a fraction of their former strength. SS-Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich's 6. SS-Panzer-Armee, with its six badly shrunken divisions, found itself facing 4 Soviet armies. During the following days the Soviet masses charged constantly into the Panzergrenadiere of the Leibstandarte. The few remaining Panzer IV's, Panthers and Tigers hit the advancing enemy again and again and temporarily stopped his attacks.

Peiper fought in these battles without regard to his own personal safety. Within a short period his Panther was hit twice, but Peiper only received a light concussion each time from this. When radio contact with German tanks was lost during a Russian attack, Peiper grabbed an open, all-terrain vehicle and drove from tank to tank – during the Soviet attack – in order to pass his orders on to their commanders.<sup>32</sup> SS-Untersturmführer Konrad Heubeck, commander of the 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was also badly wounded and lost a leg. He was awarded the Knight's Cross on 17 April 1945 after destroying a total of more than 52 tanks.

The southern group of the Leibstandarte was fighting at Kislöd – Ajka – Urkút. The war diary of Heeresgruppe South commented on the division: "The Kampfgruppe of the Leibstandarte under the command of its divisional commander, stood like the buttress of a bridge in a raging torrent washing around it." <sup>33</sup> The fighting retreat across Hungary took everything that the tankers, Panzergrenadiere, engineers, and gunners had to give, in brief it took all that those who fought had in them of aggressiveness, devotion to duty, and self-sacrifice. The Soviets attacked in masses with crushing superiority in men, tanks and artillery. SS-Hauptscharführer Karl Zepf described the constant day after day, week after week, demands for superhuman efforts from these German soldiers:

We were scarcely back in position when the Russians approached again. Russian tanks appeared in the early morning which by-passed our position on both the left and right at a range of about 500 meters, heading west. Then the Russian infantry tried to take our position, but we were able to push back all their attacks ... Then, in the afternoon, we received orders to fall back.

A squad leader with a machine gun covered our withdrawal. The company fell back in good order. I stayed behind as the last man until everyone reached the edge of the city of Veszprém. We waited for our vehicles to come up. Then we went toward Pápa. A new Kampfgruppe was put together between Veszprém and Pápa. Obersturmführer Sievers, formerly of the 3. Kompanie, took command of this Kampfgruppe of about 120 combat engineers; Untersturmführer Kühne became his executive officer. I took over the 1st Platoon in this Kampfgruppe. We got all the SPW that were left in the 3. Kompanie. The next morning we went into action with SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. The tanks were up front, followed by the SPW with Obersturmführer Sievers and Untersturmführer Kühne. I was in the next SPW behind them with the 1st squad. Then the rest of the platoon. The 2nd Platoon followed along on a country road.

There was only swamp on the right and left, so that you couldn't

get off the road. That was the undoing of the engineer Kampfgruppe. We came to a crossroads. The tanks had already gone past it. When we reached the crossroads, some T-34's opened fire on the SPW. The second round hit the command SPW. I immediately ordered my crew to bail out. The next shot hit our SPW. We had just left it. All of the SPW were destroyed. The swamps offered little opportunity to escape. Then the Russians started their rabbit hunt. We had to pull back into the swamp to the left of the road and sank in up to our ankles. TheRussians fired at every individual man with high explosive and antitank rounds. There were less and less of us. The wounded lay around and asked to be picked up. But it was simply impossible. We had no idea of where to fall back. There was firing on all sides. My runner, a nice, blond-haired youth, was hit next to me. He was hit in the neck by an explosive round so that his head fell forward. He fell to the ground in front of me covered with blood.

After covering some 3 kilometers, we could go no further, as a river blocked our path. So we had to choose another direction and, in the process, get closer to the Russian tanks. Finally we were able to get through a gap into a village. Our tanks, which unfortunately had neglected to protect Kampfgruppe Sievers, were covering this place. When we got to them we were at the end of our strength. Untersturmführer Kühne was unable to go any further so we hoisted him onto a tank. Then the rest of us survivors climbed on too, about 20 men. We went a little further like this until we encountered SS-Obersturmführer Sievers. Every time we stopped we were used to give infantry protection to the tanks.<sup>34</sup>

On 25 March 1945 the tanks of the Panzergruppe fought against Soviet tanks and infantry at Kislöd. On 26 March 1945 the Leibstandarte pulled back to the Marczal Canal; one of the Kampfgruppen of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 first had to fight its way to the west out of an enemy encirclement. To increase the frighteningly reduced tank strength of his regiment, Jochen Peiper even took tanks from other units. SS-Oberscharführer and Knight's Cross winner Ernst Barkmann of the 4. Kompanie of the SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 of the "Das Reich" Division ran into the Leibstandarte after taking part in an attack with an Army unit:

Obersturmbannführer Peiper wanted to take our eight tanks. His entire regiment had only ten operational tanks left, but he had plenty of crews without tanks. We were supposed to break through to our unit without our tanks! He was mistaken! We wouldn't give up our tanks. So he gave us a little speech, that he was used to protecting guests, but in this situation he could not be so considerate and we would see how tough and aggressive his unit could be. My company commander, Untersturmführer Knocke, nudged me. In the next few days, up until 28 March 1945, we were able to prove to our good Obersturmbannführer Peiper that the fighting spirit of "Das Reich" was in no way inferior to that of the LAH and we became good friends.

We covered the retreat to the left and right of the highway, were constantly engaged with the enemy, and in the craziest and most dangerous positions. We held high ground for days, were written off and forgotten, and had to fight our way back through enemy occupied villages to regain contact. In fierce firefights, each platoon would help the other and fight them free again. During an early morning attack by nine T-34's, the enemy tanks first bypassed us to the left and right and then attacked us from all sides. The boldest T-34 broke through us right on the road and charged in among us to ram one of our Panthers, before my gunner blew

the turret off his hull. We destroyed all nine T-34's.

We did everything without infantry support. We were the fire brigade. With our defective barrel, we destroyed a Josef Stalin in a fire fight from a reverse-slope position, and then towed off the battlefield two of our Panthers which it had hit. The enemy pushed the LAH back northwest of Neusiedler Lake toward the Vienna Woods. After two Panthers, including mine, had been put out of action by direct hits, we blew up both Panthers in front of the enemy. We reported to Jochen Peiper and with the rest of my crews returned to SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 "Das Reich" in the Esterhazy area. The regiment had written us off a long time ago. 35

During the past few weeks, General Hermann Balck had several times submitted tendentious and false reports to the OKH concerning the behavior in combat of the divisions of the Waffen-SS, in spite of their still unbroken aggressive spirit in the indescribably hard conditions of this defensive fighting against floods of massed Soviet infantry and tanks. A request on 26 March 1945 to pull the II. SS-Panzer-Korps back behind the Marczal Canal immediately led to an unexpected reaction in the Führer Headquarters. Influenced by Balck's reports, an embittered Adolf Hitler issued an order for the divisions of the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee to remove their cuff titles. The operations officer of the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee, SS-Obersturmbannführer Georg Maier, described the reception of this order:

In the early morning hours of 27 March 1945, between 0500 and 0600 hours, the operations section staff officer on duty handed me a teletype from Führer Headquarters with the highest priority classification. Naturally enough, after such a long time, I can no longer remember the precise text and the exact time of arrival. The gist of the teletype's contents was that by order of the Führer and the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, all the divisions of the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee were no longer authorized to wear the cuff titles that they had once been awarded and that they were to be removed because the divisions had failed in their military duty and lacked courage. The teletype was signed: "Heinrich Himmler."

I couldn't believe my eyes. Full of rage and indignation, I was barely able to control myself and was just on the verge of waking the Chief of Staff, Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Kraemer, and calling the commander-in-chief's personal adjutant, Sturmbannführer Weiser, when the door opened and Sepp Dietrich entered. I reported, presented the morning situation and then handed him the disgraceful teletype. He looked at me in puzzlement, as my "frame of mind" had not entirely escaped him, but he didn't say anything.

Then he read it. He turned slowly away and bent over the map table and leaned on it with both hands so that I couldn't see his face. He was deeply shaken and moved, and it took him some time before he could pull himself together again. Then, after a long pause, still bent over the map table, he said in an unusually low, almost brittle voice, in which the deepest disappointment and bitterness could be heard: "This is the thanks we get for all we've done!"

Finally he straightened up, looked at me with moist eyes, pointed at his cuff title and said curtly: "It stays on." He shook his head again, as if he couldn't believe it. After a while, completely himself again, he asked me: "What do you suggest?" Although afterwards I knew how meaningless my words were, I spontaneously said something like the following: "I suggest asking the

Führer Headquarters whether the cuff titles should also be taken from the thousands of brave soldiers of the Waffen-SS killed in action between Lake Balaton and the Danube." Sepp Dietrich looked at me understandingly, pointed at the teletype still lying on the map table and ordered: "Don't pass the teletype down to corps. Tell Kraemer later. We'll talk about it when I get back." Then he gave me his hand, something he seldom did. I accompanied him to the front of the house. Shaking his head, he got into his car and drove off to the front, to his soldiers.36

Dietrich later informed only the commanding generals of the corps, who did not pass the order on down to their divisions. In this way, Dietrich was cleverly able to avoid creating a damaging lack of faith among the selflessly fighting troops. For security reasons, the men of the Leibstandarte had not worn their cuff titles since their transfer to Hungary.

On 27 March 1945 Jochen Peiper went to Eisenstadt, where his battalion commander, SS-Sturmbannführer and Oak leaves winner Werner Poetschke, and his company commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Hans Malkomes, were buried. The third to be buried there was the regiment's maintenance officer, SS-Obersturmführer Horst Gülden. The three coffins, heaped with flowers, were placed next to each other by the open graves. Each of these highly distinguished officers had been given an honor guard under arms from both the army and the Waffen-SS to escort them to their final resting place. The crowds of the local populace were described by one of those present as enormously large.

Jochen Peiper arrived late. He looked pale with a face of stone, his lips pressed together to a thin line. He was feeling sorrow, grief and loss. He had been in combat with Werner Poetschke and Hans Malkomes since November 1943. Both had become symbols of the élan of the Panther battalion and their frequently demonstrated personal bravery had been justly rewarded by the German Cross in Gold and the Knight's Cross. With the Honor Roll Clasp, the German Cross in Gold, the Knight's Cross and Oak Leaves, the 2nd level of the Panzerkampfabzeichen for 25 days of armored combat, the Wound Medal in Gold and the Nahkampfspange in Bronze, Werner Poetschke was one of the most highly decorated tank soldiers of the Waffen-SS.

Their commander, Jochen Peiper, spoke the last words at the graves of these loyal, highly distinguished comrades in combat. Poetschke, who hailed from Berlin, had been aggressive – always leading from the front and rock hard in combat. He was described as one of the best German tank officers. The musicians of the Eisenstadt Landesschützen-Bataillon were present and afterwards played the Song of the Good Comrade. The honor guards fired the last salute.<sup>37</sup>

On this day the tank crews of the Leibstandarte fought against Soviet tanks at Noszlop and carried out a counterattack.<sup>38</sup> The division had to pull back to the Raab, which the Soviets reached before them at some points. A few tanks and the SPW-Bataillon fought at Niczk. The commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Sturmbannführer Diefenthal, was wounded for the seventh time on 28 March 1945 on the west bank of the Raab at a briefing by SS-Brigadeführer Kumm. He lost a leg. On 28 March 1945 Peiper's tanks were defending Merseva. SS-Untersturmführer Günther Wagner, formerly in the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, arrived at the division with 1350 replacements from the Navy, Luftwaffe, and Army, half of whom had been sen-

tenced by courts-martial.

When I had them all assembled in a large square on a field, I was astonished to find Obersturmführer Preuß standing in front of me to take command of the assemblage. After a brief welcome to the men - in Preuß' sarcastic manner - he put them "at ease." I gave him a brief run down while presenting him with their personnel files ... As I had express orders to return immediately to Leschan for further duties, and Preuß had briefly described the situation to me, I asked him for permission to stay with the SPW-Bataillon. The next morning I headed up to the front lines on the Raab with a few replacements. While looking for the SPW Battalion, I ran into Obersturmbannführer Peiper at the command post in a tall building, which provided an overview across the river vegetation. I reported to him concerning my replacements and my wish to remain at the front. Peiper showed me where my former heavy weapons company, the renamed 12. (schwere gep.) Kompanie, was located. He would request my transfer from the Officer Main Office by teletype. 39

SS-Untersturmführer Wagner commanded the 12. Kompanie until he was wounded in Wilhelmsburg. At the same time as Wagner, SS-Untersturmführer Adolf Sellmeier, who had been the Spieß for the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, arrived at the battalion and took over command of Preuß' 10. (gep.) Kompanie.

In the evening of 29 March 1945 orders arrived for the German units to fall back to the Reich Protection Position. On 29 and 30 March 1945 the Panzer IV's fought against enemy infantry attacks in the Raab Position.<sup>40</sup> On March 31 1945 the Leibstandarte, or those groups which were still fit for combat, fought against the Soviet masses in Nikitsch and Sopronkövesd.

# Fighting Against the Soviets on German and Austrian Territory: 1 April to 8 May 1945

On 31 March 1945 Panzergruppe Peiper crossed the borders of the Reich at Sopron and elements of the Tiger Battalion at Deutschkreutz. Starting at Veszprém, the Panzergruppe had gone through Márkó – Herend – Varoslöd – Kislöd – Ajkarendek – Noszlop – Merseva and was continuously in action against the pursuing Soviets. After a sudden artillery bombardment the Panzer IV group disengaged from the enemy on 31 March 1945 and reached the Pöttsching-Sauerbrunn area east of Wiener-Neustadt. SS-Hauptsturmführer Klingelhöfer was ordered back to the Reich to get new tanks, so that the remaining tanks of the 7. Kompanie were consolidated with those of SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck.<sup>1</sup>

On 1 April 1945 Panzergruppe Peiper's 6. Kompanie received ten new Panzer IV's at the freight yard in Wiener Neustadt. This Panzer IV group under Sternebeck fought against Russian tank thrusts heading for Wiener Neustadt.<sup>2</sup> The headquarters section leader of the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Unterscharführer Rudi Voigt, was fatally wounded in the stomach by a piece of shrapnel at Bad Vöslau. The company commander's driver, SS-Rottenführer Eckert, was likewise killed. While the Kampfgruppen of the Leibstandarte moved to the west during the night of 1/2 April 1945 and took up positions in the mountains at the entrance to the Piesting Valley, the Panzer IV group was fighting against several Soviet tank and infantry attacks against the southern outskirts of Wiener Neustadt and against tank thrusts aimed at Felixstadt.<sup>3</sup> Elements of the 2.

Kompanie of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 were fighting at Neudörf. Peiper then had his Panzergruppe pull back. He fought with it through enemy-occupied Wiener Neustadt, reaching the road to the Piesting Valley in the afternoon.

On 3 April 1945 the Panzergruppe was pushed back into the Piesting Valley, and on that day and 4 April 1945, fought near and at Wöllersdorf. On 5 April 1945 Peiper moved the Panzergruppe through an obstacle at a brook and Berndorf to Pottenstein, where it immediately had to fight off Soviet attacks from the north and west. Pottenstein and Berndorf were at the focal point of the fighting in the next few days. On 6 April the Sternebeck group was fighting at Medau-Hof.<sup>4</sup> SS-Untersturmführer Günther Borchers of the 9./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was north of Berndorf with a Kampfgruppe consisting of four Panzer IV's, four assault guns and 50 grenadiers, who were armed with 20 rifles, a machine gun and a few pistols. The rest were "armed" with clubs. A 3.7 cm Flak dispersed the Russian infantry north of Berndorf, while T-34's knocked out two Panzer IV's which, however, could be towed away.

SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Obersturmbannführer Bernhard Siebken had its main lines along the line from St. Veit a.d.G. to Aigen with the regimental command post in Grillenberg. The III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 under SS-Obersturmführer Preuß was at Aigen and was in contact with the cadet battalion from the Wiener Neustadt Military Academy under Hauptmann Hofschuster.<sup>5</sup> On 7 April 1945 Soviet infantry and tanks made an attack on Pottenstein from the Gainfarn – Hirtenberg sector north of the Kottingbrunn – Berndorf road and pushed into Ölitz. Elements of the Panzergruppe and the SPW-Bataillon, which SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Georg Preuß had commanded since 27 March 1945, attacked the enemy and beat him back, destroying 11 tanks in the process. The defensive perimeter of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 1 had to be pulled back to the northern edge of Pottenstein.

On 8 April 1945 the Kampfgruppen of the Leibstandarte again had to repel Russian attacks in the Berndorf – Pottenstein area. SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck's tanks smashed a Soviet thrust at the eastern outskirts of Pottenstein. SS-Obersturmführer and Knight's Cross winner Fritz Langanke, commander of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment "Das Reich," was assigned by the head-quarters of the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee to operate as an independent Kampfgruppe between Vienna and St. Pölten and authorized to confiscate all operational tanks from the repair shops and put them into action.

At a repair shop in the vicinity of Vienna, I came across two Tiger II's, which were just getting ready to move out. One of them was from the LAH. I showed the crews my orders signed by Sepp Dietrich and required them to be ready to go with me within one hour. Naturally they protested vehemently and I allowed the LAH crew to make contact with its regiment beforehand. One of them took off to do this and in a really short time the commander of the SS-Panzer-Regiment LAH, Obersturmbannführer Peiper, appeared.

I immediately reported to him and explained my mission. We had never met each other. He, a well known man, already of considerable rank. Me, the opposite. At first, in a rather loud and excited fashion, he wanted to dress me down and take his Tiger under any circumstances. However, when I forcibly pointed out

that I had received a clear mission from our army headquarters which granted me the necessary authority to carry it out (as it appeared in the written orders), using force if necessary – which I would not have hesitated to do – he just looked at me for a while without speaking. He swore briefly and violently. Then he calmed down and with great seriousness expressed himself somewhat as follows: "Of course you are right. We are all caught in the rigid laws of order and obedience, which is especially binding on those who embrace it voluntarily. I am sorry that I blew up at you so violently. You are only doing your duty, as I do mine. However, I will take my crew with me." I answered: "Jawohl, Obersturmbannführer. I have a few extra crews with me." The Tiger II was handed over and we parted with a handshake.

From 8 to 10 April 1945 the crews without tanks as well as the supply elements of I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 were assembled in Rotheau - Eschenau, some eight kilometers south of Wilhelmsburg. An infantry combat team of some 150 men under SS-Untersturmführer Reiser was formed from them. It was attached to Kampfgruppe Kling for the defense of Wilhelmsburg. SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper organized the Panzer regiment into three Kampfgruppen. The one named after him occupied the Hainfeld - Traisen sector, north of the Gölsen Valley, and had a small number of Panthers and Tiger II's. Kampfgruppe Kling consisted of a few Tiger II's from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 and infantry elements from the Tiger Battalion and other units and fought at Wilhelmsburg. Kampfgruppe Sternebeck had the remaining Panzer IV's from the 6. and 7. Kompanien and it fought in the Triestingtal - Fahrafeld - Weißenbach - Neuhaus Altenmarkt sector.<sup>8</sup> Infantry Kampfgruppen were also formed from the crews without tanks, support elements, the supply company, the repair company, and the light company of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501. The 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 moved to Wilhelmsburg.9

On 9 April 1945 Kampfgruppe Sternebeck was conducting defensive fighting against a Russian infantry and tank attack at the western outskirts of Pottenstein. On the following day it covered the withdrawal to the eastern outskirts of Fahrafeld. Starting at 1500 hours on 9 April 1945 the SPW-Bataillon moved with its elements and a main aid station. An enemy attack on St. Pölten was stopped. The Spieß of the 4./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, SS-Hauptscharführer Fritz Müller, destroyed three Soviet tanks with Panzerfäuste during a tank attack on St. Pölten. 11

On 10 April 1945 the SPW-Bataillon was at Steinberg, with Hofschuster's Cadet Battalion on its right. The command post of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was at Pöllau. During the withdrawal of the officer cadets along the Pottenstein – Pernitz road on the evening of 11 April 1945, as ordered by SS-Obersturmbannführer Siebken, the Soviets entered Pöllau. The battalion commander, Hauptmann Hofschuster, was relieved of command and the cadet battalion was incorporated into the II./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.<sup>12</sup>

On 12 April 1945 the cadet battalion attacked Steinhof and Steinberg on both sides of Pöllau. On 12 and 13 April Sternebeck's Panzer IV's were fighting at Fahrafeld and covering at Weißenbach.<sup>13</sup> On 12 April 1945 the command post for SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß' SPW-Bataillon was at the crossroads southeast of Weingartenweg before Grabenwegdörf. <sup>14</sup> On the morning of 13 April 1945 the II. (gemischte )/SS-Panzer-

Regiment 1, under the command of SS-Sturmbannführer Paul Guhl, arrived at Weißenbach. The battalion consisted of the 3. and 4. Kompanien of the I. Abteilung and the 5. and 8. Kompanien of the II. Abteilung of the Panzer regiment. These companies could no longer be equipped with tanks in the fall of 1944 before the Ardennes offensive and, for that reason, had been left behind in the billeting area at Rahden. Along with the staff and two training companies, they were loaded onto trains at Rahden on 27 March 1945 and transported by way of Uelzen – Salzwedel – Stendal – Magdeburg – Dresden – Aussig – Prague – Znaim to Nikolsburg where, on 10 April 1945, they were brought to St. Pölten by truck by way of Guttenfeld – Znaim – Krems. 15

The II. Abteilung of the Panzer regiment, organized into grenadier companies, went into its ready positions northwest of Pöllau on Glötz Mountain. At 1630 hours it attacked Pöllau. SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Stiller fought there as commander of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1:

I got a bit off line with the company and made enemy contact in front of Pöllau. The company had gotten mixed up a bit in the woods. The enemy fled from Pöllau. Victory looked close. Obersturmführer Denker got his 4. Kompanie between us. In this confusion I had to pull out my company and shift position to the right. Against expectation it went well, and we were able to move rapidly against Steinhof. The Russians were there with three antitank guns and infantry with submachine guns. The 1st Platoon bogged down in front of Steinhof. I took the 2nd Platoon across the road in front of the village. In the meantime, the 3rd Platoon arrived. When we attempted to destroy the antitank gun with a machine gun, mortar fire came down on us. Then the 3rd Platoon was also across the road and moving up the hill. We bogged down 100 meters from the wooded top. The enemy was very strong there. We couldn't get into Steinhof. We had continuous contact with the Russians. We could no longer expel the antitank guns from the village as it was too dark and impossible to surround the enemy with open flanks.16

The 1st Training Company, under the command of SS-Untersturmführer Hans Hennecke, and the 2nd Training Company, under SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, who was released from the hospital early, were incorporated into the Panzer regiment's defense sector. Only the platoon and squad leaders in this unit had frontline experience, while the men were brand new volunteers with two months of training. During this period SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinz Meier, the former divisional adjutant, who had released himself from hospital, arrived at Kampfgruppe Peiper. He had been hit in both eyes with shrapnel during a fighter-bomber attack on 23 January 1945 and had lost the right eye. The winner of the German Cross in Gold wrote:

What drove me to leave the hospital and bypass the chain of command to get back to the division or its remnants? Perhaps it was desperation and an unconscious search for security. My immediate homeland was threatened by the Russians and my wife and children had been evacuated to Bergland ... It was desperation. The unit had become my idea of home!<sup>17</sup>

Peiper used Meier, who had been a platoon leader in his 11. Kompanie in 1941 – and who is still night blind to this day – to maintain contact between the separated elements in the defensive front. Concerning the fatal situation and the internal, psychological outlook of the officers, Heinz Meier wrote:

We were all cared for in the unit as in a family, which also

explains the readiness to put our lives on the line, right up until the collapse was unmistakably obvious. With comradeship like that, what else was there to do? And even among the group of officers, which we felt to be a solid unit, we never debated how it would be. In all of us it was like a psychosis – that we would fight. There was scarcely anyone who discussed how the "end" would appear, at least to their other comrades. A phenomenon that can only be explained by the way Germans are and our natural inclination towards loyalty. An attitude which became irrelevant to subsequent generations and why we are not understood, even today.

It is indisputable that even in the final hopeless days for us there was no thought or question of our laying down our arms. For each of us, the myth of fighting for home, wife and children had become our heart's desire. 18

On 14 April 1945 tanks from Kampfgruppe Sternebeck supported an attack on Bettsteighof.<sup>19</sup> The crews without tanks of the Tiger battalion under Kling took St. Georgen, together with a few remaining King Tigers. They forced the Soviets back to the north. Kampfgruppe Kling was fighting at St. Georgen on 16 April 1945. The Soviets had recaptured it. The Soviets then pushed all the way to Wilhelmsburg, where they were halted after losing two tanks.

A tank attack from Ochsenburg against Wilhelmsburg was repelled. SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck's tanks fought at Weißenbach. On 17 April SS-Sturmbannführer Kling's men fought along with elements of the SPW-Bataillon at Wilhelmsburg and pushed the Russians out of the northern section. Eleven enemy tanks were destroyed. That night there was close combat in Wilhelmsburg. The command post for SS-Obersturmführer Tomhardt's 11.(gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 caught on fire, and his men were opposite the Soviets at very close range.

On 18 April 1945 Sternebeck's tanks fought Russian reconnaissance units at Neuhaus and provided cover at Fahrafeld.<sup>20</sup> The Russians bypassed Wilhelmsburg and swung to the south to advance to the main route between St Veit and Altenmarkt and cut off the I. SS-Panzer-Korps from its supply lines. SS-Oberscharführer Kurt Fickert, the leader of the "Wirbelwind" Flak platoon of the 4./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, described the fighting at Wilhelmsburg:

During the fighting for Wilhelmsburg, I was instructed by Peiper to hand two SPW with quad Flak over to SS-Hauptscharführer Schröder (author: 10. (Flak)/SS-Panzer-Regiment I). During the withdrawal from Wilhelmsburg a bridge collapsed under SS-Standartenjunker Staudegger's Tiger. I had to blow up a Flak tank. Fortunately, one of them had already made it over the bridge in front of Staudegger. The Tiger had then proved too heavy for the bridge. We then broke through to our lines that night with Staudegger, his crew and my men.<sup>21</sup>

SS-Obersturmführer Tomhardt set up the command post for the 11.(gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in the Sonnhof Spa Hotel at Schwarzenbach. The company which had broken out of an encirclement that afternoon had taken heavy casualties and was in position in the forest. On 19 April 1945 Kampfgruppe Sternebeck moved from the Neuhaus – Weißenbach area to Rohrbach by way of Hainfeld. On 20 April 1945 Jochen Peiper was promoted to SS-Standartenführer. The commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer and was awarded the German Cross in Gold on the basis of his award of the Nahkampfspange in Gold on

1 April 1945.

On 1 April 1945 SS-Unterscharführer Werner Kindler, cannon platoon leader in the 12. (schwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, and SS-Hauptscharführer Rudi Knobloch of the 10. (gep.) Kompanie, who was no longer with the battalion, were also awarded the Nahkampfspange in Gold. Following that they too were both awarded the German Cross in Gold on 20 April 1945.<sup>22</sup> For this occasion, Preuß and Kindler were ordered to the regimental command post.<sup>23</sup>

A few more veteran noncommissioned officers and men who had been at the front for years with the SPW-Bataillon were lacking only a few days of the necessary number of 50 confirmed days in close combat to receive this, the highest infantry distinction. Among them was Willi Pluschke of the Combat Engineer Platoon of the 12. (schwere gep.) Kompanie who had 49 days of close combat. He was promoted to SS-Oberscharführer on 20 April 1945. Also close were SS-Unterscharführer Günther Ludwig (49 days), SS-Unterscharführer Günther Janzen (48 days) and his former company comrade and later driver for the battalion commander, SS-Unterscharführer Paul Zwigart (48 days), all of the 9. (gep.) Kompanie. From the 10. (gep.) Kompanie there were SS-Unterscharführer Karl Menne and Helmut Urbat and a few more, who had also clearly experienced and survived more than 40 days of close combat.24 With Dinse, Preuß, Kindler and Knobloch, the SPW had four men who wore the Nahkampfspange in Gold, the highest distinction for the frontline soldier.

Its former commander, Jochen Peiper, had already received the Nahkampfspange in Silver in September 1943 for the more than 30 days of close combat which he had survived by 12 July 1943. After taking over the Panzer regiment, Peiper had tank battle days tallied starting in November 1943 and was also awarded the Panzerkampfabzeichen in Silver. Despite that he continued to wear the Infantry Assault Badge in Bronze which he had won in 1940 as his combat badge. The tankers wore the first combat badge earned since, as a rule, they were all eligible for the Panzerkampfabzeichen in Silver so long as they belonged to the fighting elements. On 14 April 1945 the SPW-Bataillon, which had been designated for more than three years as the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, was redesignated the I. (gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.25 In its place, the former I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 became the III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.

On 20 April 1945 eight wounded from SS-Hauptsturmführer Möbius' 2./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 were treated by the Panzer regiment's regimental surgeon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Knoll, at Rohrbach an der Gölsen. They were brought to the rear on a tank, after the previous attempt to bring them back in ambulances was blocked by Soviet fire which, once again, did not respect the Red Cross symbol. Peiper immediately had another attempt made.

On 21 April 1945 the Soviets broke into Hainfeld. Peiper launched a tank counterattack against them, which was carried out from the west along the Gölsen Valley road. It didn't succeed, however, and the tanks set up a defense at Ödhofen. There the Panzer IV Kampfgruppe fought off Soviet infantry attacks. Elements of Peiper's operational group, including the SPW-Bataillon, were able to stop the advancing Russians on the slopes south of St. Veit and Wiesental before they reached the Gölsen

Valley road. SS-Sturmbannführer Kling's Kampfgruppe had broken out of Wilhelmsburg and assembled at Rotheau. From there it attacked Eschenau and threw the Soviets out of the village. Peiper's Kampfgruppe blocked the Traisen Valley road north of Rotheau. During the period from 21 to 28 April Kampfgruppe Sternebeck was in action at Kleinzell in the Halbach Valley. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser relieved Sternebeck for the last two days.<sup>27</sup>

On 22 April 1945 the Leibstandarte and the "Hitlerjugend" division shifted further to the south. SS-Untersturmführer Borchers of the 9. (Pi.)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 was at Hainfeld:

We had to fall back again. The Russians were already at Hainfeld. We bypassed Hainfeld and attacked it from the south. We threw the Russians out. They put snipers in the church, and we didn't clear them out. The civilians had left their houses. We defended the village with three tanks. North of Hainfeld Ivan had set up an antitank gun on a hill. We were given no peace by the mortar, antitank gun and artillery fire. After the village had changed hands several times, there was hardly a house left standing. Then we pulled out of Hainfeld for the last time. We went back into position 1000 meters south of the village. And the Russians immediately attacked there. They left dead behind, but soon pushed us out of this position too.<sup>28</sup>

The few Panzer IV's left were fighting on 22 April 1945 east of Engelsscharen. On 23 April 1945 those elements of Kampfgruppe Peiper in action between Hainfeld and Rohrbach fought their way back through the Halbach Valley. SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck reported: "Repelling enemy attacks in the Halbach Valley. We were being pushed more and more into the narrow valley. Only one tank still had a field of fire and that put us more and more at the mercy of the enemy infantry. It was a desperate, wearing, and hopeless battle with no chance of success." His tanks made contact with the enemy at Frauenthal. The tank of SS-Unterscharführer Walter Schüle of the 6. Kompanie was employed separately from the company as a rear guard. Elements of the SPW-Bataillon pulled back to the heights in front of Lilienfeld.

On 24 and 25 April 1945 elements of Peiper's Kampfgruppe fought their way back through the Halbach Valley to the Gütenbach Valley and the cliffs at Kleinzeller. SS-Brigadeführer Kumm wanted to set up a new line of resistance on the north slope of the Reis Alps. The tankless 5. Panzer-Kompanie under SS-Obersturmführer Stiller climbed Hochstaff Mountain above Traisenbeck and Kleinzeller Hinteralm and took up positions at Point 1012. It then sent out scouts to the Reis Alps and the Ebenwald Range. Later the company moved up to Hill 1020. An infantry Kampfgruppe of the 3./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 under SS-Untersturmführer Waldemar Warnecke moved through Plambach to Kleinzell on 24 April and was immediately involved in fighting with the advancing Soviets. The battalion adjutant of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, SS-Untersturmführer Eduard Kalinowsky, also commanded an infantry Kampfgruppe, whose actions on 20, 22, and 27 April counted as confirmed days of close combat for him and his men.32

On 25 and 26 April 1945 the few Panzer IV's left were fighting east and west of Fischermühle. On 29 April 1945 the remaining tanks, with four Panzer IV's from Kleinzell among them, were pulled out as they could no longer be supplied with ammunition and were positioned alone without infantry support on the mountain roads. The companies of the Panzer regiment which were still

provided with tanks - i.e., the 1., 2., 6., and 7. Kompanien which had been combined into the I. (gemischte) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 since the fall of 1944, were renumbered to distinguish them from the tankless companies of the II. (gemischte )/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. While the 1. and 2. (Panzer V) Kompanien retained their numbers, the 6. and 7. (Panzer IV) Kompanien were renamed the 3. and 4. Kompanien. The tankless companies of SS-Sturmbannführer Guhl's II. Abteilung were redesignated as follows: the 3. and the 4., became the 6. (Grenadier) and the 7. (Grenadier)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 respectively. The 5. and 8. Panzer-Kompanien kept their numbers, however, they too received the additional designation (Grenadier).33 This change of name was even marked in the pay books. In order not to confuse the reader with this number game, the description of the final days of the fighting in this book will continue to use the old company numbers. Moreover, as a minimum, the 6. and 7. (Grenadier)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 immediately had their old company designation re-entered in their pay books once they were taken prisoner.34

On 29 April 1945 Peiper's command post was in St. Anton an der Jeßnitz. A collection point was set up there for the Panzer regiment, whose tank elements moved on the same day from the inner Halbach valley – Ochsattel – Hohenberg – Türnitz into the area of Schwarzenbach a.d. Pielach.<sup>35</sup> There SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck prepared the last requests for awards of Iron Crosses and Panzerkampfabzeichen of the higher levels and handed them in to the regiment in St. Anton.<sup>36</sup>

The SPW-Bataillon was the corps reserve at Kleinzell. The next few days passed in positional warfare, assault actions and occasional Soviet artillery bombardments. During this period, 16-year-old Klaus Graf von Baudissin, whom Peiper had met during his leave in Rottach-Egern and who had washed his car, suddenly appeared at the regimental staff. Shortly thereafter he was severely wounded and died on 25 April 1945 at Türnitz. <sup>37</sup> Ten new Panzer IV's arrived at the Panzer regiment, coming from Grafenwöhr. <sup>38</sup>

On 1 May 1945 the news of Adolf Hitler's death in Berlin reached the unit. This report lowered the morale of the men, which had already reached a record low point, even deeper. What was going to become of their homeland, of Germany? In the east, Germany had already been occupied by the Soviets all the way up to the Elbe in places. The Americans and British were in the south and west. Concern weighed heavily on those men whose families lived in the east of the German Reich where Stalin's hordes were rampaging. From their own experiences in Hungary and Austria they knew how Red Army troops behaved toward the German civilian population in the areas they had captured. Each had his own thoughts concerning the death of the German head of state, who had brought hope to most Germans and to many other Europeans. SS-Unterscharführer Hans Dorn, commander of a Puma armored car in SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1, described his feelings:

The news arrived in the morning on the death of the Führer, Adolf Hitler, in Berlin. It upset me deeply. Up to that point, as long as he was alive, I had believed in the final victory or in a way out of the approaching defeat. All by myself I wandered through the alder woods of the pasture and sat down by the banks of the Danube. How long I sat there, I no longer know. 39

During this period the latest version of the Tiger II, the Jagdtiger ("Hunting Tiger"), was issued to the Leibstandarte's

Panzer regiment. This oversized tank destroyer, with 20 cm of frontal armor and its mighty 12.8 cm gun, was practically invincible. There were 70 Hunting Tigers produced. To pick up the Hunting Tigers, veteran crews from schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501 were pulled out of infantry action and sent by truck in the final days of April through Amstetten to St. Valentin an der Enns. There were six Hunting Tigers at the Hermann Göring Works there which, however, were not provided with the 12.8 cm but with the 8.8 cm gun. The tank destroyers were not yet operational, so that the crews themselves had to lend a hand. SS-Untersturmführer Waldemar Warnecke, responsible for getting ammunition for these tank destroyers, was able to take delivery of sufficient rounds and stow them inside the Hunting Tiger. After the machine guns, radios and other pieces of equipment were installed and a few driving exercises carried out, all six Hunting Tigers moved into Panzergruppe Peiper's operational area. SS-Untersturmführer Warnecke and Hahn drove four Hunting Tigers on 4 May 1945 through Amstetten and Purgstall into the area of Scheibbs.39 The two other Hunting Tigers moved on Federal Highway 8 (Linz - St. Pölten) on the following day. 40

On the evening of 7 May 1945 Peiper met with some of his officers in the school at St. Anton. "The dream of the Reich is finished!" Peiper was heard to say and it was recorded in his diary by the Panzer regiment's surgeon, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Knoll, one of those present. Peiper's last command post, before the march to the Enns, was in Annaberg, north of Mariazell. The last two radio messages from the division reached Peiper there and they are paraphrased here: Capitulation on 9 May 1945 at 2400 hours. Move back to the west to cross the Enns at Steyr by 2400 hours on 8 May 1945. The Enns was the demarcation line and had to be crossed before 2401 hours on 9 May 1945 in order to be taken prisoner by the Americans. Anyone who didn't manage to get there would become a Soviet prisoner.

On 8 May Jochen Peiper called together those members of the Panzer regiment's staff that he could reach, to arrange for a final formation. The commander spoke to his men for the last time. Peiper stood before them with a calm exterior but with internal turmoil. His eyes wandered over the tankers standing in front of him who were watching their honored commander Jochen Peiper. He was wearing his black leather jacket, his black tank trousers and his weather-bleached officer cap. He stood straight as an arrow. His face was deeply serious and his lips were pressed together to a narrow slit in bitterness. After a while he began his brief address. His voice, normally so clear, bright and young, sounded oddly thick. He thanked everyone for their years of willingness and their loyalty. Then he informed them that the war was over and that Germany had surrendered to the Allied powers. In a slower, gentler voice, he warned the men that Germany needed them alive and that he saw no sense in suicide.44

They stood there in front of him and listened to his words as if in an dream. Many battle-hardened tank commanders, gunners and tank drivers fought to control themselves, some of them were unable to hold back their tears. Had everything then been really in vain? The years of exhausting effort, the monstrous sacrifices, the many dead friends who had fallen at their sides; this couldn't have all been for nothing? Germany was lost by the unconditional surrender which left it defenseless and without rights.

Peiper had the Panzergruppe move out on the way to the Enns and American captivity. His tank was blown up and his crew

started the march to the west with him. The last decorations and promotions were approved and some were entered into the pay books. The staff burned the soldiers' field records. With that, Jochen Peiper, like all his men, headed west to the Enns. What was running through his head? The war had lasted five years and eight months and now Germany had to surrender. What would become of his men? What was his own future to be? Question after question. For a long time, Peiper had suspected and had said that this war could no longer be won militarily for Germany. Disappointed, and lost in thought, Peiper sat in the vehicle which carried him over the mountain roads to Steyr on the Enns.

After SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck had learned of the surrender on the morning of that day he assembled the crews of the five Panzer IV's of the 6. Kompanie and every other element he could reach. He was so torn up that he himself was barely able to get dressed. A man from the company had to help him. Finally, Sternebeck, this tough, strong-willed company commander, hardened in so many tank battles, stood in front of his men. He struggled with his composure: "We stand here, undefeated," were the words his men heard. They stood there in front of him as if transfigured into stone. But then he could say no more, his voice failed him and he wept. Afterwards he passed on Peiper's last orders, according to which he would negotiate with the Americans and the regiment was to get over the Enns, by force of arms if necessary.<sup>45</sup>

The Panzer regiment's Kampfgruppen went a number of different ways as the roads were jammed in some places. The Panzer IV Kampfgruppe with SS-Obersturmführer Sternebeck marched from St. Anton to the Enns. On 8 May 1945 Sternebeck halted along the way and awarded the last decorations, including the higher levels of the Panzerkampfabzeichen. SS-Untersturmführer Rolf Reiser received them with the 25 and the 50 at the same time, Sternebeck with the number 75. SS-Unterscharführer Otto Fischer received the Iron Cross, 1st Class and, as a prisoner on 20 May 1945, he and SS-Unterscharführer Walter Schüle of the 6. Kompanie received the 2nd level of the Panzerkampfabzeichen for 50 battles. 46 Sternebeck's Kampfgruppe passed through Scheibbs - Gresten - Ybbsitz - Waidhofen to reach the Enns at Weyer on 9 May, where they drove the last four tanks into the river. Then they marched south with the wheeled elements and crossed the Enns at Altenmarkt.

The SPW-Bataillon's last command post was cleared out and the commander of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, had the battalion assemble on the morning of 8 May in Türnitz. He informed it of the truce, remembered the fallen, and wished the men well. SS-Unterscharführer Erich Straßsgschwandtner described what happened next:

Then we stood there alone. Our last company commander was Werner Kindler (author: SS-Oberscharführer with the German Cross in Gold and Nahkampfspange in Gold) The last noncommissioned officers and men of the 12. (schwere gep.) Kompanie gathered around him on two cannon SPW and three regular SPW. We started out toward Annaberg. We closed the road over the pass with the vehicles which had been left behind. On 9 May the Russians started after us. Once more our last cannon roared out and brought peace to the entrance to the pass. But then we moved at top speed through Scheibbs, Waidhofen and Weyer to Ternberg, where we arrived on 10 May. There we drove the SPW down the slope and into the Enns at full speed. We were certainly

the last of our unforgotten battalion. We went into bitter captivity.<sup>47</sup>

After the surrender Panzergrenadiere of the SPW-Bataillon on their march into captivity saw Russian soldiers raping the Austrian women in many places. They could do nothing to help as they could no longer shoot. Their screams reached the grenadiers. Then they understood what unconditional surrender meant: to be offered up defenselessly to the enemy and his caprice.<sup>48</sup>

The radio operator in one of the Hunting Tigers, SS-Sturmmann Ernst Kufner, reported:

On 7 May we reached the divisional command post in Scheibbs. There were already rumors going around there that the war was to be ended. As at this point in the negotiations with the Americans it was not yet clear whether all the members of the division were to be allowed to cross the demarcation line of the Enns, we were sent out with the Hunting Tigers and a few Panzer IV's to force the crossing of the Enns, if necessary.

During the night from 8 to 9 May 1945, we stopped in Waidhofen on the Ybbs River. Then we had different orders: Cover the retreat against the Soviets. A stone bridge was the end for a Jagdtiger at Waidhofen. It was too narrow. When moving backwards a track came off. We blew it up with a Panzerfaust and pulled it off the bridge with our Hunting Tiger. This caused considerable alarm among the fleeing soldiers, as we had blocked the only way back for a while. We changed our position to the outskirts of Waidhofen, along the road to Weyer-Markt an der Enns. We held on there with great impatience until the late morning hours of 9 May 1945. Soldiers from every branch of service streamed past us. And so did our regimental commander, SS-Standartenführer Peiper. He saluted us and wished us well. To ensure we had a vehicle, we took a civilian truck, a wood gas burner with a French driver, and positioned it about 200 meters past our tank. We intended to drive homewards with him. We stowed our belongings in it.

Toward noon the last soldiers and civilians, some on horseback, came past. All of them were excited and informed us that behind them Russian tanks with infantry riding on them had already reached Waidhofen. But my tank commander kept his nerve. He had our tank drive onto the road with the Panzer IV's beside us in the field. We blew up all the tanks. A brook with trees ran along the other side of the road. This couldn't be crossed, even with a tank. We ran to our truck and took off. The road was jammed with vehicles. Although the Soviets reached our tanks, they couldn't get any further. As a farewell, they fired a few salvoes in our direction. We rounded up some military horses which were grazing in a field and beat it across the mountains.<sup>49</sup>

After Waidhofen, Jochen Peiper's car headed southwest to Weyer-Markt, where he met SS-Untersturmführer Warnecke and the four Hunting Tigers providing covering. He ordered him to blow up the tank destroyers. After they had been driven into an open area, the Hunting Tigers were blown up and the crews crossed the Enns and went into captivity on 10 May 1945 at Altenmarkt. As they continued on their way, Peiper's Kampfgruppe met SS-Sturmbannführer Karl Rettlinger, the commander of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1. He joined Peiper. After that Peiper and his small group reached Steyr, where the vehicles were driven into the Enns and the river was crossed. They didn't meet any Americans there yet. West of the Enns Peiper said

farewell to the staff members who had been traveling with him, in order to go further into the mountains with a smaller group in order not to stand out as much.<sup>51</sup> His signals section leader, SS-Unterscharführer Willy Micheluzzi, saw him there for the last time: "Peiper said good-bye to everyone with a handshake. I don't have to mention that we all had tears in our eyes. We then separated into different groups, most of them intending to go north." <sup>52</sup> Even the men of his tank crew separated from Peiper.

Along with Sturmbannführer Paul Guhl, his adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Köchlin, the commander of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1, SS-Sturmbannführer Kurt Rettlinger, and the commander of SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1, SS-Obersturmführer Gustav Knittel, Peiper then continued marching west. Jochen Peiper had his goal firmly in mind: He wanted to go home, to Rottach-Egern on Lake Tegern.

If the reader wants to ask whether it wasn't somewhat naive of him to try to cover the distance to his family right away – after all, the Americans would certainly find him there more rapidly than elsewhere - then the modern reader is committing a logical mistake, based on what one knows today. One has to keep in mind that on 9 May 1945 the war was over for the German officer Jochen Peiper. He had no reason to reproach himself and hadn't the slightest suspicion or thought that the Americans would make a special effort to find him. He was even completely ignorant of any reason for such an action, otherwise he would certainly have chosen a different route. He had absolutely no idea of the waves the "Malmedy case" had made in the United States. His intention to go home bears witness to Peiper's uprightness and openness. If he was discovered by the occupational soldiers who were rummaging everywhere through occupied Germany, he would have known of no reason why he shouldn't turn himself in. He had fought openly and fairly against his enemy in both east and west, as did the men of his regiment and division. And he followed the same path home after the war as they did.

For the next few days the group marched over rising mountain paths, crossed large areas of forest and extensive meadows and, at night, slept in hay stacks or with farmers. After a number of days they reached Bavaria and approached Peiper's place of residence, Rottach on Lake Tegern. On 22 May 1945 Peiper and Guhl were surprised by an American patrol on a tennis court at Lake Schlier. They were outnumbered and any attempt to flee would have been pointless.

# American Captivity: 22 May to 21 August 1945

The Americans searched Peiper and then he and Guhl had to get into a truck. They were initially taken to the Rottach prisoner-of-war Camp and then to Feuchtwangen. Their treatment corresponded to the International Geneva Convention concerning the treatment of prisoners of war. There, because of his rank, Peiper was made the German camp commandant. At the end of July 1945 he was transferred to the prisoner-of war-camp at Nuremberg-Langwasser. Then SS-Standartenführer Jochen Peiper shared the bitter fate of millions of German soldiers: Delivered defenseless into the hands of the victorious powers. He would soon discover what that meant. On 21 August 1945 Jochen Peiper was taken away.<sup>2</sup>



On 11 January 1945 Jochen Peiper was awarded the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross.

## The Swords for SS-Obersturmbannführer Peiper

Berlin, 16 February 1945

# Die Schwerter für 44-Obersturmführer Peiner

Berlin, 16, Februar

Der Fullie.

ichenlaub des Ritterkreuzes des Liserium
reures-an
ff-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper,
egimentskommandeur in der ff-Penzerdivision
Leibstandarte ff Adolf Hitler' als 119, Solaten der deutschen Wehrmacht.

ff-Obersturmbannführer Peiper wurde zu
erlin geboren. Seit November 1943 führt er des
anzerregiment der ff-Panzerdivision "Leibtandarts ff Adolf Hitler". Bet der deutschen
Wilteroffensive im Westen war er Kommanleur einer gepanzerten Gruppe, die im Schwermakt des Angriffes durch die Eifelt und die
rdennen eingesetzt wurde. Er führte also die
wech Westen vorgestoßenen Teile orten Gruppe,
Angriffes durch die
unen eingesetzt wurde. Er fe
itesten nach Westen vorges
ngriffstruppen. Als die Gru
feindlichen Divisionen eiband sie sechs Tage leng
ischen Kräfte und brach
n Kessel aus.

em Kessel aus, von Peiper geführte Unterneh roßer Bedeutung für den opera er ganzen Offensive, weil er dad starken Feindkräfte band, ein h angesetzten Einhelt einen fas Vormarsch ermöglichte.

The Führer awarded the Swords to the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross to SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper, regimental commander in the SS-Panzer-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler." He was the 119th soldier of the Wehrmacht to receive this award.

SS-Obersturmbannführer Peiper was born in Berlin. He has commanded the Panzer regiment of the SS-Panzer-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" since October 1943. During the German winter offensive in the west, Peiper commanded an armored group which was employed as the Schwerpunkt of the attack through the Eifel and the Ardennes. As a result, he commanded the elements of the attacking force which penetrated the furthest to the west. When the element was surrounded by three enemy divisions, it tied down these strong forces for six days and then broke out of the encirclement at night.

The operation led by Peiper was of great importance for the operational success of the entire offensive, since he enabled a unit employed further south to advance practically without a fight.

# TWO NEWSPAPER REPORTS OF THE AWARDING OF THE SWORDS TO THE KNIGHT'S CROSS BY ADOLF HITLER TO JOCHEN PEIPER

#### The Swords to the Oak Leaves

Berlin, 16 February 1945

The Führer awarded the Swords to the Oak Leaves to SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper, regimental commander in the SS-Panzer-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler." During the German winter offensive in the west Peiper commanded the elements of the attacking force which penetrated the furthest to the west. When the element was surrounded by three enemy divisions, it tied down these strong forces for six days and then broke out of the encirclement at night. Strong enemy forces were tied down as a result of that and enabled a unit employed further south to advance practically without a fight.

# Die Schwerter zum Eichenlaub

dnb. Berlin, 16. Februar

Der Führer verlieh die Schwerter zum Eichenlaub an #-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper. Regiments-kommandeur in der #-Panzerdivision "Leibstandarte # Adolf Hitler". Bei der deutschen Winteroffensive im Westen führte #-Obersturmbannführer Peiper die am weitesten nach Westen vorgestoßenen Teile der Angriffstruppen. Als die Gruppe von den dei feindlichen Divisionen eingeschlossen wurde, band sie sechs Tage lang diese starken gegnerischen Kräfte und brach dann nachts aus dem Kessel aus. Damit wurden starke Feindkräfte gebunden und einer weiter südlich angesetzten Einheit ein fast kampfloser Vormarsch ermöglicht.



SS-Sturmbannführer Jupp Diefenthal, commander of the SPW-Battalion, received the Knight's Cross on 5 February 1945.



SS-Oberscharführer Erich Strelow, tank commander on the 1. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was awarded the Ehrenblattspange of the German Army on 25 February 1945 for his performance during the Ardennes Offensive. He was killed in action on 19 February 1945 in Hungary.



SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß, commander of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, received the Knight's Cross on 5 February 1945. He received the Nahkampfspange in Gold in April 1945 and the German Cross in Gold. He was the last commander of the SPW-Battalion.



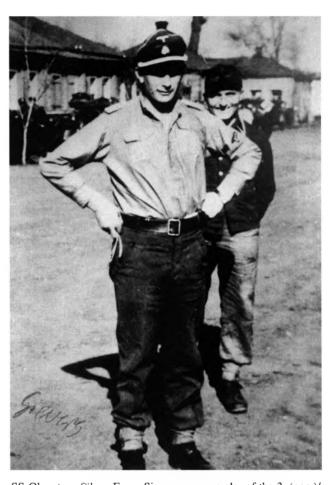
SS-Unterscharführer Karl Übler led the cannon platoon of the 10. (gep.) /SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 and received the Ehrenblattspange of the Army on 25 February 1945 for his performance in the Ardennes.



SS-Untersturmführer Karl Flacke, Adjutant of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Here seen as a SS-Standartenoberjunker.



SS-Oberscharführer Paul Sernetz (here seen as a SS-Unterscharführer), orderly of the SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501.



SS-Obersturmführer Franz Sievers, commander of the 3. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1, which was attached to Panzergruppe Peiper. For his actions at Stoumont he was awarded the Ehrenblattspange on 25 February 1945. Sievers was recommended for the award of the Nahkampfspange in Gold.



SS-Untersturmführer Günther Borchers, platoon leader in the 9.  $(Pi.) / SS-Panzer \ Regiment \ 1.$ 



Hungary, February 1945. Peiper and SS-Hauptsturmführer Jahn during an orders conference prior to Operation "South Wind", the attack against the Soviet bridgehead on the Gran.



Cannon SPW commander, SS-Unterscharführer Werner Kindler and Seppl Pointner of the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.



SS-Unterscharführer Max Seiler, SPW driver in the 12. Kompanie.



Cannon SPW commanders of the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in February 1945 in Hungary. From the left: SS-Unterscharführer Karl-Heinz Rodenstein, Leo Binke and Werner Kindler; SS-Oberscharführer Helmut Feldvoß (platoon leader); SS-Unterscharführer Seppl Pointner, SS-Sturmmann Fritz Clement, SS-Unterscharführer. Fritz Müller, SS-Rottenführer Karl-Heinz Fetzer.



Peiper's command tank in Hungary in February 1945. Right: SS-Hauptsturmführer Helmut Jahn. Peiper is just climbing out of the turret.



Hungary. February 1945. The cannon SPW of SS-Unterscharführer Werner Kindler. Left: the driver, Machein; next to him, the vehicle commander Seppl Pointner.



Hungary: SS-Untersturmführer Kuno Balz, platoon leader in the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 until he was wounded on 11 February 1945.



SS-Untersturmführer Walter Brauer, combat engineer platoon leader in the 4./SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501, was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Nahkampfspange in Bronze during the final fighting in May 1945.



Werner Kindler, SS-Oberscharführer and cannon platoon leader in the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. He was awarded the German Cross in Gold and the Nahkampfspange in Gold in April 1945. He survived 56 close-combat days.



SS-Sturmmann Heinrich Kahlen, gunner for the Knight's Cross winner SS-Obersturnführer Werner Wolff in Panther "100" of the 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Hungary.



Cannon SPW commanders of the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in 1945 in Hungary. From the left: SS-Sturmmann Ludwig Clement, unknown, SS-Unterscharführer Leo Binke, Seppl Pointner and Werner Kindler; SS-Oberscharführer Helmut Feldvoß (platoon leader); SS-Unterscharführer Fritz Müller and Karl-Heinz Rodenstein; SS-Rottenführer Karl-Heinz Fetzer.



Hungary, March 1945. Men of the 9. (Pi)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.



SS-Hauptscharführer Heinz Knappich (seen here as a SS-Oberscharführer), platoon leader in the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. He was reported missing in action in Hungary in March 1945.



SS-Untersturmführer Günther Wagner commanded the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in April 1945.



SS-Panzerschütze Heinz Rütten of the 4./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. He was reported missing in action in March 1945.



SS-Unterscharführer Walter Schüle, tank commander in the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 until the last day of the war. He was awarded both levels of the Iron Cross and the 3rd level of the Panzerkampfabzeichen (at least 50 days of armored fighting).



Band composed of tank drivers of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. in March 1945.



March 1945 in Rahden. The 3., 4., 5. and 8. Kompanien of the Panzer Regiment are left without tanks in Germany. In front: the commander of the II. (gemischte)/SS-Panzer Regiment 1, SS-Sturmbannführer Paul Guhl, with his adjutant, SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Köchlin (left).



SS-Unterscharführer Otto Fischer, radio operator in the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. After La Gleize, he was a tank commander and the leader of the company headquarters section. He was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the 3rd level of the Panzerkampffabzeichen for 50 days of armored combat.



SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff, commander of the 1./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, was mortally wounded on 20 March 1945 at Inota.



SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Poetschke was awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross on 15 March 1945 while serving as the commander of the L/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. After the telegram announcing the award was received, the battalion clerk constructed an oversized Knight's Cross.



Jochen Peiper in April 1945 during the final fighting in Austria.



April 1945 in Austria. Jochen Peiper with SS-Obersturmbannführer Martin Groß, commander of SS-Panzer Regiment 12 "Hitlerjugend".







Jagdtiger were issued to SS-Panzer Regiment 1 in May 1945.



A Jagdtiger awaiting rail loading.



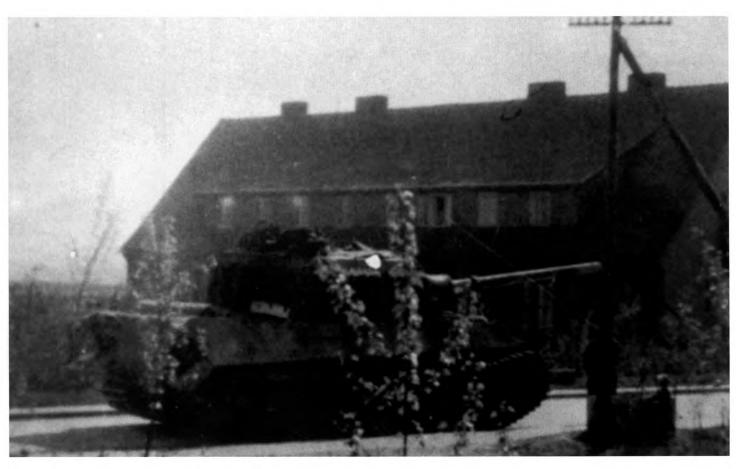
Side view of a Jagdtiger.



View of the production line at the Nibelungen Works at St. Valentin with several Jagdtiger in various stages of assembly.



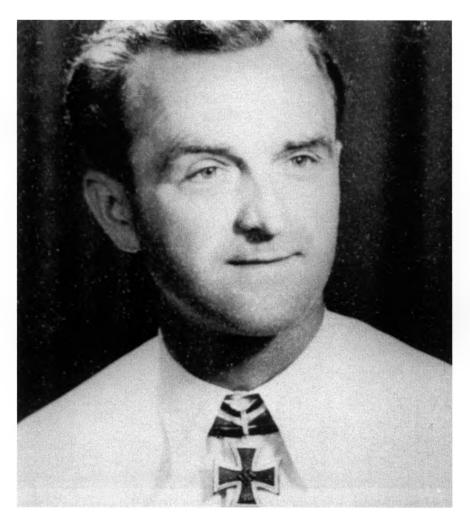
SS-Untersturmführer Günther Borchers.



Test driving a Jagdtiger at St. Valentin at the beginning of May 1945.



The war is over. Men of the Headquarters Company of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. In the front: Franz Heinrich.



SS-Untersturmführer Konrad Heubeck, commander of the 1./SS-Panzer Regiment 1 after Wolff was mortally wounded on 20 March 1945. He was awarded the Knight's Cross on 17 April 1945.



Piontek and Schirmer from the Headquarters Company of the II./SS-Panzer Regiment 1 on 8 May 1945.



 $SS-Untersturm f\"uhrer\ Walter\ Brauer,\ of\ the\ 4./SS-Panzer-Abteilung\ 501\ and\ SS-Untersturm f\"uhrer\ and\ Winfried\ Lukasius\ .$ 



The only pictures taken on the day of the capitulation in the area of the SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Depression and resignation are reflected in the faces of the men. Left: SS-Untersturmführer Winfried Lukasius of the 3./SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501.



Prisoner-of-war camp at Uttendorf-Mauerkirchen. SS-Untersturmführer Arndt Fischer, Rolf Ziege and Günther Borchers.



SS-Untersturm führer Winfried Lukasius, platoon leader in the 3./SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501.

## The Interrogations

On 22 August 1945 Jochen Peiper was brought to Freising near Munich, where the US 3rd Army maintained a center for prisoner-of-war interrogation. Two days later he was questioned concerning the Ardennes Offensive. There, for the first time, he was accused of the killings at the cross roads near Malmedy on 17 December 1944. His interrogation officer, who had appeared at the Mauthausen Trial as a prosecutor under the name of Lieutenant Guth, called himself Paul during this interrogation. Peiper himself described his experiences during his interrogation at Freising:

The following points were made clear to me:

1: The information that they had received concerning me presented me in a surprisingly favorable light.

- As Himmler's adjutant I was the only one who had kept his personal integrity.
- b) There was no contention concerning my reputation as a tank officer and as a proper soldier.
- c) Major McCown's G-2 report cast a particularly favorable light on my actions during the Ardennes Offensive.
- 2: a) The American public had become extremely upset concerning the so-called "Malmedy crossroads" incident and categorically demanded a sacrifice.
  - b) As the press had gotten hold of just my name by accident it had already identified me as the murderer of Malmedy ever since. I was the most thoroughly hated man in America and, besides, the GI's "number one enemy."
  - c) I was already liable, since
    - 1) I had been Himmler's adjutant
    - 2) The press in the great powers had already condemned me in advance.
    - 3) I presented a "potential threat" as a likely under ground leader.
  - d) It was intended that I confess that I too understood the art of losing and admit that the American prisoners of war were shot at the Malmedy crossroads on my orders. <sup>2</sup>

Jochen Peiper was interrogated a total of six times in Freising.<sup>3</sup> There he became aware that the Americans had a special fixation concerning him. Peiper was informed there of the serious accusations which had been raised against him and other soldiers in his Panzergruppe, which had as their basis his supposed orders for the shooting at the Malmedy crossroads on 17 December 1944 and other places in Belgium during the Ardennes Offensive. His treatment by the Americans in Freising, which he received while under the protection of the International Geneva Convention as a prisoner of war, were undignified and unworthy for a captured officer.<sup>4</sup>

Presumably it was made clear to Peiper at Freising that he was to be tried in a court where he had already been sentenced to death. Because he already been declared guilty by the American press and because of the hatred that he encountered at Freising, Peiper knew that he had no real chance in the planned trial. He thought a lot about the days of the winter of

1944 and tried to bring back an exact memory of the events during the Ardennes Offensive. Too many pictures from a long war on the Eastern and Western Fronts were burned into his memory. What did he really know about the incident at the aforesaid Baugnez crossroads at noon on that 17 December 1944? Peiper had driven past the American prisoners in his SPW in order to get to Engelsdorf as quickly as possible. He had seen them standing there, but he had had nothing to with them and had only seen them for a very few minutes. That was it; he hadn't done anything else there. Neither at that meadow, nor anywhere else, had he ever given any soldier in his Panzergruppe orders to shoot Americans. But now, he heard from his American interrogators that he was supposed to have ordered the Americans who had been taken prisoner to be shot and they had been shot deliberately. Moreover, right before the Ardennes Offensive, he was supposed to have issued orders not to take any prisoners.

Peiper had no internal defenses against these false accusations. He knew that the American victors had woven a net of lies and defamation around him and his men and what sort of danger he was facing. He felt that the decision concerning his life had already been made. Jochen Peiper was an officer and could fight against men, tanks and guns; something he had proven countless times during six years of war. But now the enemy was using other weapons against him and Peiper was defenseless against the power of the lie. Under this sheer unbearable pressure which was placed on him, Jochen Peiper showed himself during these hours of hopelessness and defenselessness to be a true officer in the best German tradition. Paying no attention to the truth or falsity of the American accusations, he protected the men who had been under his command. "I declared I was ready to assume full responsibility, but only under the provision that none of my subordinates was to be accused or tried. Before such a declaration could be accepted at that time, a commission of inquiry showed up specifically for the Malmedy Trial, led by Captain Fenton."5

Peiper's character is revealed by this act. All those who had thought him to be unapproachable and standoffish could see how much Peiper valued his men. As a superior and an officer – on the basis of his honor as a German officer and his personal ethos – he could only try to protect his men, regardless of his personal fate. Be more than you appear, is an old Prussian saying, and the Prussian Peiper lived it during this absolute darkest hour.

During an interrogation Captain Fenton badgered Peiper hard to prepare a detailed report on the Ardennes Offensive.

Since then as before, we were still at war with America, and as an imprisoned enemy officer I was still under the protection of the Geneva Convention, I at first refused to make any comprehensive report concerning the Ardennes Offensive. Only when I was told that this would hurt my men badly and that my silence would doubtless worsen their lot did I put an exhaustive description into the record. Enemy tactics were based on not giving me any time to take a break and think, in order to prevent me in this way from "inventing new stories" (an interrogation lasted eight hours). This meant that I was unable to avoid being inexact concerning details of time and place, especially as I had to make myself familiar with material which I had regarded as unimportant for a long time and the memory

practically came as a result of speaking. No corrections of any kind were possible, as the extremely voluminous record was no longer read out. <sup>6</sup>

On 7 September 1945 Major Kenneth Hechler questioned Peiper exhaustively concerning the period from 11 to 24 December 1944, the preparation for the Ardennes offensive and the offensive itself. The record of this conversation began with the following description, translated into German, at the beginning:

Colonel Peiper is a very arrogant, typical member of the SS, uncompromisingly full of the Nazi philosophy. He is very proud of his regiment and his division and tends to make derogatory remarks concerning other units. It would seem that he is uncertain of his future. As soon as it became clear that our conversation would be limited to tactics and not to war crimes, he became more outgoing ... Physically, he is not as big as he is described in some reports.<sup>7</sup>

When Heckler informed Peiper that in the vicinity of Stavelot he had been close to a giant American fuel dump, he shrugged his shoulders, grimaced, and just said dryly in English: "I'm sorry." This astonished us both, the translator and me, so that we sat for half a minute with our mouths open.<sup>8</sup>

It was only at this point that the interrogating officers realized that Peiper spoke English. As the interrogation continued, Peiper corrected the translator several times in perfect English.9

In September 1945 Peiper was transferred to the Military Intelligence Service Center in Oberursel near Frankfurt am Main. There he became acquainted with another level on the interrogation scale employed by the armed forces of the United States of America. Initially he was kept for seven weeks in strict solitary confinement. Then the Americans arranged something special for him; they put him into a heated cell.

For 24 hours I was locked in the so-called warm cell, and this was heated to 80° Celsius. I was denied facilities for eliminating human waste and was told that I would be warmed up. As the duration of the proceedings and the increasing heat left me in no doubt of the seriousness of their intent, I was left with no choice but to destroy both the heaters and the window if I wanted to escape the torture without permanent damage to my health.<sup>10</sup>

No further interrogations took place at Oberursel with the exception of an interrogation by a Counterintelligence Corps Officer, who questioned him on the general behavior of American prisoners of war. He wanted to know exact details concerning the American Major McCown, who had spoken to Peiper on numerous occasions as a prisoner in La Gleize and who had accompanied him on the breakout until his escape. "As my partner in this conversation deviated markedly from the truth concerning McCown, my answers were given in an ironic tone and were deliberately devious," Peiper wrote."

On 18 September First Lieutenant Samuel Tobin had a conversation with Peiper concerning the period from 16 to 19 December 1944 during the Ardennes Offensive. During the period in Oberursel the Americans prepared some of their own soldiers for the trial. The leader of the preliminary investigation and, later on, prosecuting attorney Burton Ellis, took Peiper to Denzheim, where he confronted him with the sur-

vivors of the American observation battery, which had supposedly been ordered shot down at the Baugnez crossroads. None of the American soldiers recognized Peiper. <sup>13</sup>

In October 1945 Peiper was transferred to Zuffenhausen near Stuttgart, where the Americans had set up a camp for suspected war criminals.14 With massive physical and psychological intimidation and deliberate individual pressure, the American interrogators attempted to break the prisoners' resistance and will and get confessions from them in that state which could be used as evidence to convict them as war criminals. These American interrogators were already waiting for Jochen Peiper. He was to be rendered docile so that he could be put on show as the Americans soldiers' number 1 enemy in a Hollywood-type trial. "Treatment was bad and degrading. I was kept for five weeks in a virtually dark cellar. For two days I was given nothing to eat and for three weeks I was unable to wash or shave. The sanitary arrangements defy description. I was robbed and insulted."15 For a period of four weeks, Peiper was given only one opportunity to wash.<sup>16</sup> On top of that he became sick with typhus in January 1946.

Peiper met First Lieutenant William Pearl in Zuffenhausen, whose special interrogation techniques were also felt on the bodies of numerous other Leibstandarte soldiers. They explained to Peiper:

I was the most hated man in America and public opinion demanded my head. I had suffered especially bad luck inasmuch as there was the son of a senator and the son of an influential industrialist among the victims at the crossroads. The enraged fathers had spread the story around and mobilized the press. They had created a political furor from a military "incident" that could no longer be ignored ...

Even if I had been an extraordinary soldier, deified by my soldiers, I must not forget today's realities. My time was gone and would never come back. It was merely the drive for political survival that forced the victors to eliminate dangerous elements such as me. Our main crime was the fact that we had lost the war and the question of individual guilt was given only secondary importance. He gave me his word that I would never again see the light of day. Moreover, in order to create a basis for the eventual elimination of the entire SS, this would be declared a criminal organization shortly. At the moment there was no legal action possible against the Waffen-SS, in and of itself, according to the Haag Land Warfare Convention, however, the Malmedy Investigative Commission would doubtlessly be enough to correct this.

In my case, he advised me to save face and reconcile myself to the inevitable with dignity, mindful of the high ethos and the moral duties which a Prussian officer had toward his subordinates. On the basis of the respect which I enjoyed with all previously interrogated soldiers, and also on the basis of a generally favorable impression, the interrogation officials believed that they could count on my readiness to assume full responsibility. In the belief that in this way I could do my comrades one last service, I agreed to this, with one requirement – for an American and a German notary to be present, in front of whom it was to be sworn that in return all the soldiers in my division would go unpunished. This compromise was refused. First Lieutenant Pearl even told me why: "Even if you now committed suicide in your cell, leaving behind a declaration

according to which you gave the order to shoot those men and for which you bore the chief responsibility, I would contest this in court and testify that you had nothing to do with the shooting. The Führer's loyal Leibstandarte isn't going to get away that easily!"

The remarkable agreement in the terminology employed by First Lieutenant Pearl and Mr. Paul, alias Lieutenant Guth, led me to suppose that the conquering powers had a large-scale plan of revenge. The striking openness in this connection and Mr. Pearl's unguarded expressions displayed a thoroughly triumphant certainty. With respect to this attitude and to the extremely flagrant disregard of international agreements in my treatment, I did not imagine that I would be given an open trial, but I prepared myself to be executed in cold blood ... This evaluation of my situation was of essential importance for my later testimony. 17

On 3 December 1945 Peiper was transferred to Schwäbisch Hall. On the previous day he was beaten, once again with a black hood over his head. For many of the previous soldiers of the Leibstandarte, the name Schwäbisch Hall means terror. In 1945/46, 1100 former soldiers of the Leibstandarte were collected by the Americans in this large, old prison, in order to investigate their suitability for trial. How these "investigations" took place there will be illuminated by a report drawn up by Jochen Peiper on 5 November 1948 in his Landsberg cell and signed by the American warden:

On 3 January (author: 1946) I was handed over and immediately put into an unheated, so-called death cell. All of my personal belongings were stolen from me there; I was stripped naked and threatened for about an hour with submachine guns (three American lieutenants). When the initial signs of a lung infection appeared as a result of the cold and insufficient protection from it, I was transferred on the sixth day to a one-man cell in the hospital after making a complaint on the occasion of a visit by Lieutenant-Colonel Ellis. In March I was moved back into a regular prison cell. There was no physical exercise.

On the way to interrogation a black hood was drawn over my head. This cowl, reminiscent of the Ku-Klux-Klan, was frequently smeared with fresh blood on the inside and reeked with a sickening stench. For the purpose of psychological intimidation and preparation for the interrogation I was taken several times back and forth through the prison and once even through the furnace room. From the interrogation cell I could hear the smacking noise of blows, the sobs and screams of my comrades and the cursing of the interrogating officer. The voices were mainly those of Paul and Thon, which I knew well. I was warned several times of the violent methods of the interrogating officials by the internees who took care of us. In two cases I was informed of the suicide of a comrade. I myself was badly mistreated while on the way to an interrogation, without being able to see my attacker.

A light was kept burning in my cell and I was robbed of the necessary sleep by systematic disturbance on the part of the guards. Apart from the fact that I, an officer prisoner of war, had to wear the striped prison clothes, the entire day consisted of premeditated and organized degradation. My military decorations were occasionally worn by Mr. Paul during the interrogations of my men, although Lieutenant-Colonel Ellis had

given me his word of honor that they would be sent to my wife.19

At the beginning of their reception at Schwäbisch Hall, the imprisoned soldiers were robbed of any belongings or valuables that they had left by American officers and noncommissioned officers. Then, the men were deliberately demoralized by weeks of solitary confinement, without the slightest possibility of movement outside a cell or contact with other prisoners. In the interrogations by the Americans at Schwäbisch Hall at the beginning of 1946, which were conducted by the American War Crimes Commission led by the former tax attorney Lieutenant-Colonel Burton Ellis, in which First Lieutenant William Pearl, Captain Raphael Shoemaker, Harry Thon and Kirschbaum were prominent for the brutality they practiced, a clever web of lies and promises was woven around the helpless and defenseless men of the Leibstandarte. The objective of the interrogations was to play subordinates against their superiors and to obtain damaging testimony against the latter from them.

During these interrogations the prisoners were beaten and kicked in the face, stomach, head and genitalia by Pearl, Shoemaker and others. Commissions investigating later on found evidence of smashed testicles, broken jaws and knocked out teeth.<sup>20</sup> If the men didn't "confess" to the unproved crimes of which they were accused, they were put under additional massive physical pressure, beaten and threatened. When even these tortures didn't provide the Americans with the desired results, the prisoners were accused and confronted in front of the interrogating officers with personal crimes fabricated and invented by the interrogators.

They weren't the only targets of the threats made by the American interrogation officers, however. Their families, parents, wives and children were targets of the American interrogation strategy. It was explained to the soldiers coming from the Soviet-occupied zone that if they refused to make this or that accusation against their comrades and superiors, they would have the Soviets take away the ration cards from parents living in the east.21 For the men who refused to admit their "guilt" and who had held out through all previous torments, there were fake trails held in Schwäbisch Hall, in which they were sentenced to death. At these trials, American officers dressed as catholic priests and took last confession from the sentenced men. The men were then slowly strangled until they lost consciousness. These and other procedures then finally forced the soldiers who had no defense whatever against them to write "confessions" and accusations against other comrades and superiors, as dictated by the American interrogation officers. In their fear and desperation, these mostly young soldiers could see no other way out but to put down on paper what was dictated to them.

The author has read these forced confessions and many of them not only agree in content, but are identical verbatim. Jochen Peiper described this period of endless spiritual and physical torture in Schwäbisch Hall in detail. At the same time this report makes it clear why Peiper also wrote down "confessions" extorted from him:

In consideration of the main role which the American government believed itself correct in assigning to me, for the understanding of someone not involved and, at the same time, for my comrades, I have to clearly describe the essential features and conditions of the situation at that time. When the waves of victorious Allies crashed together over the drowning Third Reich early in 1945 the soldier who had been at the front for years was completely surprised. Even if he had no longer believed in any possible victory, he was unable to grasp the fact of unconditional surrender which crippled him in both in mind and in spirit. Depression, as well as pain and shame and, not least of all, a feeling of deep disgust with life, were the hallmarks of the inner feelings with which the soldiers of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division had to allow themselves to be locked up in the cells of Schwäbisch Hall Prison.

The simultaneous process of dissolving the unit - virtually overnight - which had for so long replaced the family and the conversion from an honored defender of the fatherland to a strictly isolated prisoner under interrogation, was so abrupt, and the shock so deep, that there was no longer any question of resistance, something which the nine-month-long imprisonment under interrogation would have justified ... The apparent injustice of the proceedings, the treatment which went against all the provisions of the Geneva Convention and, not least, the atmosphere of a medieval court of inquisition, which the interrogating officials spread over every aspect of the prisoner's lives, added wearying disgust and apathetic resignation to already existing conditions. If you looked at the men in general, you saw a picture of young, inexperienced men, who were products of a war-influenced environment and were unsuspecting and helpless in the face of the interrogation tactics used. What was even worse, they had the carefree attitude of those with clear consciences in the knowledge that they had done their duty to the last for their homeland.

Under the overpowering circumstances, the only possible support essentially left to them after total defeat was their belief in the indestructibility of a comradeship forged in the fires of frontline combat. "If we want to proceed any further, we have to first break down their comradeship," said Captain Shoemaker as representative of the prosecution at the opening of the Malmedy Trial. This was the intention of the interrogating officers when, as well-known, they tried to play off superiors against subordinates and used tricks, fake trials, mistreatment, threats, false witnesses and lies to bring this about. This finally destroyed the prisoner's belief and last reserves. He was forced to recognize the hopelessness of his situation and, playing under these rules, considered it completely futile to continue to struggle for justice and freedom. Worn out and uncaring, he allowed the finely spun net to be cast over his head. Everyone must have reached the following conclusions:

- a) Personal guilt or innocence wasn't investigated here and, with regard to the future, was immaterial, as they couldn't let us loose as we had seen and experienced too much of American interrogation methods.
- b) It seemed to be out of the question that our case would come before a regular court. We could only expect the proceedings to be held rapidly and in secret.
- c) This meant that it made no difference if we allowed our testimony to be dictated at least there would be some relief in the unbearable pressure on us.
- d) If by some unexpected chance we were brought to a public trial, then the entire ramshackle edifice of lies would collapse like a house of cards. The statements

previously made couldn't be considered perjury, as it was obtained under duress, apart from the fact that it was a prisoner of war's duty to mislead his captors.

The spiritual nihilism resulting from the collapse of the fatherland and the loss of all previous values, along with the conscious furtherance of this condition in the Schwäbisch Hall torture chamber, are the real reasons for the existence of the so-called "voluntary confessions," already suspect because of their uniformity. Outsiders will be unable to understand the background of the "Malmedy case" without a penetrating study of the psychological connections, and the purely formal legal review must always remain a patchy thing without a full examination of the facts.

The proceedings transcribed in Freising – as I remember, toward the end of January 1946 - were read to me by Mr. Fenton, who had been promoted to major in the meantime. The translator was Mr. Harry Thon. As, understandably, my thoughts in the preceding months had concerned themselves a great deal with the Ardennes Offensive, I was in a position to make a large number of corrections. Major Fenton refused to consider them with the remark that there were too many of them and that, in any case, I would have to write them down again in a comprehensive written defense. This fundamental report, containing all the points of my defense, was written by me and taken by Mr. Thon. They used my signature to deceive my officers to whom they read an imaginary text at the same time, according to which I had confessed all the crimes I was accused of. The release of my "written defense" to my subsequent defender was refused by the prosecutor's office.

At the beginning of March 1946 I was brought before First Lieutenant Pearl. He informed me that since our last meeting, highly threatening clouds had gathered over my head. All the men and officers had confessed, including Generals Dietrich, Kraemer, Prieß and Mohnke. I was the last in the chain of interrogations. If I were now to continue to lie concerning the shooting at the crossroads, he would unfortunately find himself forced to take serious measures. It would depend upon my behavior as to whether reprisals would be taken against my family and I would be handed over to the Russians. After I had explained to Mr. Pearl with a polite smile that I was a poor subject for threats and besides considered him too good a psychologist to make such an elementary mistake, he suddenly spoke in a confidential and friendly way: "We know that you didn't have anything to do with the crossroads. We don't want you, we want Dietrich!" On the next day they revealed to me that there was a passage in the army's order of the day, according to which prisoners could be shot if the military situation demanded it.

Finally, I was confronted with some six to eight of my officers who confirmed this. After they had stood around for a long time in the corridor with shrouded heads, they made a totally broken, spectral appearance when they entered. Their frightened eyes, looking toward me for help, for the first time raised doubts in my mind concerning the solidity of frontline comradeship and, from then on, my feeling of proud contempt wasn't reserved exclusively for the interrogation officers. I informed them that there was no reason for concern, as I would protect them. Next my adjutant, Hauptmann Gruhle, was brought forward. In concise form, he too confirmed the

existence of the aforesaid order and, moreover, pointed out at the same time that he was better informed concerning the written documents of the period than I was and he could remember everything exactly.

Once more alone with First Lieutenant Pearl, I began to doubt my memory and I had the feeling that I was in the labyrinth of a psychiatric hospital. Mr. Pearl then showed me written testimony which had been signed with the familiar signatures of Generals Dietrich, Kraemer, Prieß and Mohnke (this last had been killed in action in Berlin). (author: Mohnke was in Soviet captivity.) According to the selections which he read out to me, they all confessed that the order in question had been issued and confirmed Gruhle's statements in their entirety. Since I didn't want to be the only exception to the apparently unanimous public stance of my superiors and, above all, didn't wish to appear cowardly in front of the pleading eyes of my subordinates, I wrote down Gruhle's version as dictated by First Lieutenant Pearl. I was not allowed to read through what I had written, which was put off until later. At that point in time I did not know that:

- a) Gruhle's testimony was based on a false confession by me, which had been given to him before I saw him.
- b) The testimony shown me by First Lieutenant Pearl had been falsified and none of the generals were yet in Schwäbisch Hall.
- c) My testimony was to serve as a hook to catch the Generals.

At the next interrogation First Lieutenant Pearl informed me that they no longer needed to use the crossroads against me as, in the meantime, they had assembled other charges against me. Numerous individual shootings were supposed to have been ordered and, in part, personally carried out by me. The Hillig case was especially flagrant and they already had Hillig's and Gruhle's confessions. Since I really had no idea of what they were talking about, Gruhle was called in. In a previously rehearsed question and answer session between Pearl and Gruhle, the latter confessed that I had ordered Hillig to shoot a prisoner of war.

From this moment on, I was completely indifferent to the entire proceedings. My belief in comradeship, the last value to be rescued from the mess, had been shattered. All I felt now for my adjutant, Mr. Pearl and the rest of the world was a bottomless physical and spiritual disgust. Then a little later, when Hillig himself came in and in terse sentences described me as having issued him those orders, I no longer cared at all. After Mr. Pearl had again reassured Hillig that I would protect him, I took down First Lieutenant Pearl's dictation without opposition. But, in this case as well, I couldn't know that beforehand, they had read Hillig a faked statement in which I had accused him of shooting numerous individual prisoners of war.

At the next interrogation I was informed that Major Diefenthal had shot numerous prisoners in La Gleize. My response was that naturally I was responsible for it, as I had given him the authority. This statement was then used as the basis for proceedings against Diefenthal. First Lieutenant Pearl's constant friendly appeasement was always: "One more killing is not important." As I shared this view with lazy scorn, I slowly became the one who boasted of his responsibility. After more or less 20 statements, it really didn't matter to

me and, if they had still wanted, I would have also taken the responsibility for giving the orders right at the crossroads.

Next, the Wichmann case was presented to me. Wichmann and Dr. Sickel had already confessed (their statements or the signatures below were shown to me). However, they still wanted to hear what I had to say about it. At first I asked if this were the only accusation against Dr. Sickel. After this had been confirmed, I said that I was ready to take responsibility for it and let First Lieutenant Pearl, beaming with pleasure, dictate to me that I had issued the order to shot. This time, because I was thoroughly acquainted with the events leading up to the alleged shooting, as opposed to the Hillig case, I was able to describe the details completely. This was a point which would later be raised by the prosecutor as being particularly convincing of my guilt.

Gruhle's renewed eyewitness confirmation was particularly shocking to me in this case as well. I also encountered Dr. Sickel's statement represented within the papers shown me without realizing that he had not yet been questioned and his confession, which was yet to be obtained, would only result from my testimony.

In summary, I declare that: my testimony in Schwäbisch Hall was obtained not from physical coercion, but from psychological pressure. As an incorrigible idealist, I believed that even in jail, I had to be a model for my soldiers. This high ideal of an officer's duties was cleverly used against me by the American interrogation officers, inasmuch as they attempted to prove the alleged indecency by an appeal to our sense of decency. Thanks to the clever concealment of the true circumstances, carried out with commendable industry, they were able to deceive me with a picture which brought about my moral capitulation. Disgusted by the supposed betrayal by my comrades in combat, I had lost faith in loyalty and belief. Moreover, I was too proud, and probably also too conceited, to haggle over words with my interrogator, as I saw our fate to be already decided and unavoidable. True to my military past, I regarded cowardly and meaningless efforts to swim in the flood of filth as unworthy of me – Potius mori cuam foedari! 22

Right from the beginning in their interrogations at Schwäbisch Hall the Americans attempted to force an admission from the men to the effect that orders had been issued before the Ardennes Offensive, according to which prisoners of war were to be shot and a wave of fear and terror was to precede German troops. It was intended that not only the enlisted personnel and noncommissioned officers but also the officers were to admit to these nonexistent orders so that the Americans could fabricate charges against the platoon leaders and company commanders. Especially with regard to Peiper, the Americans attempted to collect damaging material in large amounts in order to reach their verdict. Because they couldn't prove any criminal acts against Peiper in the Ardennes – which was also the case for the other soldiers – they also presented charges against Peiper based on lies and forced testimony.

As an especially horrifying example of the outrageous, virtually criminal, American interrogation techniques, the author presents the case of SS-Sturmbannführer Diefenthal's SPW driver, Paul Zwigart, who wrote the following in a sworn statement from a Landsberg cell on 22 November 1948:

On 4 December 1945 I was brought to the Schwäbisch Hall

prison. With raised hands, I then had to run a gauntlet through the entire prison up to the third floor, while kicks and blows from sticks rained on me from the rear and sides. American officers, waiting for me on the third floor in front of an open cell, took the last remaining private possessions from me and locked me in. In the middle of the night some Americans returned to my cell, in front of whom I had to strip naked and stand in a corner with my hands raised and my face against the wall. When the door closed again, I found only a freshly laid out prison uniform ...

Each time the door was opened I had to stand still and shout "Achtung." Whenever I tried to ask questions I was threatened with beatings and the door was immediately shut again. After I had been in the cell for a month and a half without leaving for a single second and had been on bread and water for no reason for some days, I soon began to despair. I was taken to interrogation for the first time in the middle of January with a hood drawn over my head. It was still quite bloody inside. Then I was pushed against a wall for about a half hour with my hands up and the hood over my head and abused and punched until I lost strength and collapsed in despair. Then I was taken into a room. When the hood was torn from my head I saw three American officers standing behind a table covered with a black cloth. On the table was a crucifix with two burning candles. At the trial, two of these officers were members of the prosecution. Their real names and ranks were First Lieutenant Pearl and Mr. Thon.

First Lieutenant Pearl said to me: "You are before an American summary court and we have the authority to hang you within 24 hours." First I was to accuse my commanders of crimes they never committed. Then I was to accuse myself of shootings which I had never done. But when I tried to tell only the truth, I was mistreated, beaten, threatened and lied to for such a long time that I finally cried aloud for help. Then I was confronted with false witnesses. After I had suffered in this way for perhaps two hours, Mr. Thon said to me: "We know everything. You have been convicted by these witnesses of perjury and are sentenced to death. Therefore help us now, for tomorrow will be too late. You're the only one who can help us. And we can help you too, so that you'll be back home in a few weeks. If you don't help us you will bitterly regret it on the gallows. Because we will get what we want."

Then I was taken to a dark death cell with the words that I was to prepare myself to be hanged. In the middle of the night, I was taken from my cell and brought somewhere. Then I stopped and a rope was put around my neck. At that point I was supposed to confess to the shootings which had never happened. When I didn't do it the rope was pulled tight. After half an hour of this torture I was kicked back into the death cell. After a while First Lieutenant Pearl arrived and said that he had stopped the execution. Now I would see that he had the power to free me or have me killed. "So confess everything," First Lieutenant Pearl said. As I still refused to acknowledge this lie, Mr. Thon told me to told to make my last confession. My reprieve had been denied. And I certainly didn't want to die with the sin of perjury.

They tormented me in this way for about three and a half weeks in the death cell. After about three weeks in the death cell I repeatedly told Mr. Thon when and where I had risked my life to save wounded Americans, and that I knew nothing of any shooting of prisoners nor of their mistreatment. Then Mr. Thon said to me: "We already know all that. But we need you as a witness for the prosecution of Peiper and Diefenthal. And if you don't help us we won't rest until you are hanged as well."

When in spite of that I still insisted on telling only the truth, the following occurred during the next few days. In the neighboring cells, I heard desperate screams with my name often mentioned. Then in front of my cell I heard the following: "Zwigart really has to get the noose, to make it easier for us." Two days later I was brought to a cell to write a declaration. Then I was presented with false declarations concerning shootings which had never taken place. When I began to write on my own I was beaten and the declaration which I had begun was torn up. In order to finally put the torment to an end, I then wrote everything which was dictated to me.<sup>23</sup>

In an additional sworn deposition, Zwigart described the kind of "confessions" and accusations dictated by Pearl:

"At the Malmedy crossroads I heard how Peiper gave the order for the shooting from my SPW, and I myself saw that our men carried out the order and shot the prisoners. "At this point I sprang up out of desperation, threw the pen on the table and refused to write down such lies. Then First Lieutenant Pearl punched me in the face and stomach and, in pain, I yelled for help at the top of my lungs ... I had to sit back down at the table and then depositions by Friedrichs, Rinek and Assenmacher were placed in front of me. And there, exactly as I was supposed to accuse Peiper and Diefenthal, they had forced these three friends to become docile tools for an untrue accusation against me. I was completely speechless, and I really had to weep over these lies, because I had carried out one shooting after another according to these coerced statements ... 24

All of the confessions written in Schwäbisch Hall were produced in this and in similar ways. At the trial they were produced as evidence for the sentencing of 73 accused by a tribunal of the United States Army. The treatment of the soldiers imprisoned in Schwäbisch Hall was unbearable for some. After they had forced a sworn statement from him, former SS-Unterscharführer Arved Freimuth of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 hanged himself in March 1946 from the bars of his cell. A medically trained witness wrote in a sworn declaration:

We had to take the corpse to the prison doctor to determine the cause of death. During the examination we observed that the underwear was blood encrusted and stuck to the body, the genitalia were considerably swollen and a zygoma was smashed. In addition, the entire body was covered with bruises, some of which had burst ... This was the only suicide that I saw myself. I learned of three others from the American guards.<sup>25</sup>

The method used by the Americans in Schwäbisch Hall, which was to get subordinates to accuse their former superiors, was also the case during the proceedings of the interrogation of SS-Obersturmführer Willi Christ, commander of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1:

Question: What did they ask you there?

Answer: The interrogation began approximately as follows:

"Don't you have something to add to your statement from Lake Eben?" I said "No." Then they yelled, "Stand up, you liar, you lying pig!" I was asked again, and I again said "No."

Question: What happened then?

Answer: Then I was called a perjurer. The interrogating official said: "Now I have you for perjury and the noose is getting tighter and tighter around your neck. You have been accused of such major crimes and the material is so overwhelming, that there is only one possibility left for you, and that is to now tell us the truth. Otherwise you'll be hanged." I still didn't know anything. Then the interrogating official read me a statement, or rather a part of a statement I was not told the name of the man who wrote the statement It was claimed that he was a member of the 2. Kompanie. According to his statement, I was supposed to have held a talk in the Blankenheimer Forest on 15 December 1944 with very specific contents.

Question: Do you remember the contents of the talk which you were supposed to have had?

Answer: At that time, I couldn't remember the issuance of orders in the Blankenheimer Forest, let alone a talk. The details were read out to me: that on 15 December 1944, I had driven to the company in my vehicle, that I had ordered the company to assemble in the woods, that there was a small fire burning and that there was a large black case similar to a typewriter case behind me. Then these things came back to me and I remembered that afternoon. In the statement, it claimed that I had held a talk and had said that this offensive was decisive and that we were to take no prisoners during the offensive and that we should spread fear and terror and that fear and terror must precede us so that the enemy would be too afraid to oppose us.

I said immediately no, I had never said that. The interrogation official told me that I had said it and had even made many remarks of this kind. In addition, my memory was hazy and subsequent speech with these three men, their insults and their accusations that I had perjured myself made me only want to get out of there ... and then they asked me if I expected that my men should be hanged for me. After that I became confused again and thought that my memory had left me in the lurch. So I asked the interrogating officials to give me an hour to try and recall everything. That was not permitted.

The interrogating officials said to me that an order to take no prisoners could only be understood to mean that the prisoners were to be shot. That was completely new to me and I explained to the interrogator that he was the first person ever to tell me that. He again assured me that this order had been issued and that it had been given by Peiper and Poetschke and that Poetschke had repeated it. All of this brought me to such a state of psychological confusion and I was so depressed that I really no longer knew what was true and what were lies. I began to have doubts about the order and finally said that the order had meant that prisoners were to be shot and that we were to spread fear and terror. That was immediately dictated to me ...

Question: Why did you say during the interrogation that you didn't go to Peiper?

Answer: I was told that the order according to which no

prisoners were to be taken had been issued by Peiper and that I had to protect myself. At the conclusion of the interrogation I asked the interrogating official when I would go to trial and he told me: "Petty criminals like yourself won't be put on trial. We don't want make a big production for such small fry as yourself. There will only be a trial on paper. It will be decided tonight and you'll find out your sentence tomorrow."

Question: Were you then returned to solitary confinement?

Answer: Yes, right after that, I was put back in solitary confinement.

Question: Were you interrogated again?

Answer: Yes, I was briefly interrogated on 12 January, 1946. At this interrogation I was supposed to accuse Peiper of being present when Poetschke gave out his orders, but I wasn't able to do that as I hadn't seen Peiper at all during that period. I refused.

Question: And were you then interrogated once again?

Answer: Yes, on 19 March 1946.

Question: What happened?

Answer: The interrogation proceeded as follows: "We had you summoned to inform you of what you are accused. We wish to give you a chance to do something for yourself. You're only an Oberleutnant. We want Peiper, Prieß and Dietrich; they're all we want, not you."

Then I was informed of the accusations against me: That I had given orders in La Gleize to shoot prisoners of war, that I had given orders in Stoumont to shoot prisoners of war, and that I had been present at the crossroads and had issued orders. I denied it. Then I was sworn at terribly and it was explained to me that if I didn't tell the truth I would be hanged at Bruchsal, my mother would be officially informed of the hanging and would never get work again and, as a result, would starve as she would then no longer receive a ration card. They also told me that I would be taken to Stoumont and shot there while trying to escape, if I didn't talk. They told me that I would rue the day in which I hadn't committed suicide, and my mother would rue and curse the hour in which she had given birth to me.

Question: A different question. Were you ever confronted with an American officer?

Answer: Yes on 4 April 1946. Question: What happened then?

Answer: I was confronted with First Lieutenant Lary and I was told that he would recognize me with completely certainty; he would know me from the period he had spent lying in the ditch at the crossroads. He had seen me now and again at the crossroads and had heard me giving orders to shoot prisoners there ...

Question: And how did you respond to that?

Answer: I said that it must be a mistake and that it wasn't possible ...

Question: I ask you, did you believe that you would hang or not when they said that to you?

Answer: At that time, I believed everything. After all, I had an American officer standing in front of me and at that time I was unaware of the methods being used for interrogations at Schwäbisch Hall.<sup>26</sup>

During the trial, former commander of the 11. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Tomhardt, described the deliberate and intentional wearing down of the prisoners during weeks and months of solitary confinement and the uncertainty produced in them by the forced statements of their comrades produced by torture – all continuously reinforced by punching and other violent measures on the part of the interrogation officers:

Before my interrogation in Schwäbisch Hall, which was the very first in my life, I had been in solitary confinement for a full quarter of a year. During this quarter of a year I hadn't seen anything else except for the four walls of my cell, and left the cell only once for ten minutes. I could speak to no one, not a single word, and I had nothing of any kind to keep my mind occupied. I was fairly depressed by the fact that I had been alone for so long and had to wait for such a long time. On 2 March 1946 I was called to be interrogated. While I was standing in the corridor before my interrogation with the hood over my face, I was hit in the head and stomach.

Question: Who hit you?

Answer: I don't know. At the time I thought that these blows were an attempt at intimidation. When later I saw the red faces of my men when they confronted me, I saw that this was a part of the interrogation and that I wasn't the only one to go through it. These blows in the face impressed me all the more as I saw that morning a hood with its interior full of blood.

Question: Where did you see this hood?

Answer: During interrogation I was confronted with one of my fellow officers and at the time I was given a bloody hood which was pulled over my head. The interrogation was carried out by First Lieutenant Pearl.

Question: Was anyone else there?

Answer: Sometimes Mr. Thon was there too. The order which my superior was supposed to have issued was made so attractive to me right from the beginning that I would certainly have taken the opportunity if I had had a bad conscience in connection with the offensive. During the interrogation I was confronted with four men of my company, who maintained that they had shot prisoners and had been ordered by me to shoot prisoners, especially civilians. I knew that about 35 men from my company were in Zuffenhausen, a preparatory camp for Schwäbisch Hall. I asked First Lieutenant Pearl to allow me to confront men who had not shot anyone, so that they wouldn't need to clutch at the straw of a superior's order. First Lieutenant Pearl told me: "These four men are enough to hang you. You will also hang if you don't confess to having given the order. Don't even think about any other men."

During this interrogation I was shown various written statements by some of my fellow officers and was also confronted by one officer. They all agreed that such an order had been issued within the Panzer battalion. In spite of that, I could not remember any such order. But as I had been made uncertain by the confrontation and by the written statements, I asked for some time to think. And I was given this time to think in the so-called death cell. I had first heard the word death cell in a conversation between First Lieutenant Pearl and Mr. Thon, which was carried on in English. During the six days in which I stayed in this so-called death cell I was given no rest either by day or night. For four complete nights, the guards beat on

the door in other rooms at various intervals, sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, and I was only able to sleep one night. During the days I heard screams of deathly fear from the neighboring cells. For two days I heard the sound of blows with loud cries of fear coming from the next cell, cries which appeared to be suppressed each time, as if the screaming man had something thrown in his face. In the intervals a voice constantly shouted: "Are you going to lie to us, are you going to tell us the truth – yes or no?"

At that time, I thought that I had men in my company during the Eifel Offensive who had just turned 17 or 18 years old. I thought to myself that it would be easy to force these men to confess to virtually anything with the kind of treatment I had undergone. I was only a frontline soldier and in my entire life I have never had anything to do with trials or interrogations. In the spiritual depression which was my state by then - and from the expressions used by First Lieutenant Pearl in the first interrogation and by Mr. Thon when he told a man who had asked for a trial: "You will not stand trial, we will take care of you in other ways" - I didn't believe that I would get any justice in this affair and I didn't think that I would be placed in front of a real court. Then on 6 March – the date there says 7 March, but it is incorrect – I was again confronted with some of the men from my company. This time there was a man among them who had not been present during the first confrontation. Then after I had been yelled at and insulted from two sides, and after someone spit on me, I allowed a statement to be dictated to me.

Question: Who spit on you?

Answer: Mr. Thon. At that time I was convinced that nothing really mattered any more. Normally one is really relieved after giving a confession. However, I didn't feel that way. I am sure that the interrogation officers knew that, because at different times I heard the guards talking in front of my door who had express orders to keep an extra sharp eye on me.<sup>27</sup>

Former SS-Untersturmführer Hans Hennecke said: "In Schwäbisch Hall, we were played against each other in such a way that it was never clear to us that we were accusing and libeling each other." <sup>28</sup>

The list of abuse, duress, etc. committed by the American interrogation officers could be greatly expanded, since there is a great number available of sworn depositions to that effect, which have been largely confirmed by further investigation.<sup>29</sup> The atmosphere of Schwäbisch Hall, where for weeks and months the prisoners were deliberately brought to and kept in a constant state of fear, including the fear of death, is of fundamental importance for the existence of all of the "confessions" fabricated there, which later served as justification for the sentences passed at the trials. The investigating officials of the Malmedy case had their required confessions and accusations in written form and handed these over to the prosecutors who had already prepared the trial.

Former SS-Obersturmführer Arndt Fischer describes the final days in Schwäbisch Hall:

As usual when I was taken, a hood was placed over my head and off we went. Only later in the process was the march in darkness not associated with screams and blows – no, they led me by the arm. We stopped, a door was opened and I was pushed into a room. The hood was removed. I must have really

looked stupid, for Standartenführer Peiper stood before me, laughed and wished me a hearty welcome. They had asked him who he wanted for a cellmate, and so I was together with him until the end of the trial.<sup>30</sup>

As a farewell in Schwäbisch Hall, the American Chief Prosecutor, Lieutenant Colonel Burton Ellis, declared to Jochen Peiper:

I admire you and I know scarcely any other soldier whom I value as highly as I do you, but you are sacrificing yourself for an ideal which no longer exists. The men whom you believe you must support are villains and criminals. I will prove that to you during the course of the trial. We will part now as friends, but when we see each other again in front of the court it will be as enemies and I will have to paint you in the bloodiest of colors. But you will understand that I am only doing my duty.<sup>31</sup>

## The Trial: 16 May to 16 July 1946

One month before the beginning of the trial almost 300 former soldiers of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" were brought to Dachau and quartered in the barracks of the former concentration camp. After Schwäbisch Hall the Americans had selected 74 of them to accuse, and the others were held available as witnesses. On 9 May 1946 Jochen Peiper was released as a prisoner of war and his status was converted to that of an internee. This was yet another violation of international law, for, as stated in article 49, paragraph 1 of the Geneva Convention: "No prisoner of war may be deprived of his military rank by the power detaining him." By losing his prisoner of war status, Peiper additionally lost the guaranteed protection and care of the International Red Cross, which, of course, was exactly what the Americans intended.

On 16 May 1946 the trial began in a building within the camp, with the participation of the press and in the presence of a small audience. Frau Peiper was present during some of the days of the trial, as were other family members of the accused who, with great difficulty, had managed to get to Dachau through the rubble-filled wasteland of occupied and divided Germany. During the trial the 74 accused sat on benches arranged in rows, rising one behind the other. They wore their old uniforms without the epaulets and collar insignia, which had been ripped off long before. Each one had a placard on his chest with a number given to him by alphabetical order. The 74 accused soldiers had no illusions as to the outcome of the trial, and the statement by former SS-Obersturmführer Arndt Fischer undoubtedly expressed the opinion of every one of them: "After what had been done to us in Schwäbisch Hall, it was clear to all of us that we would be hanged."3

The particular charges against Peiper were enumerated as follows:

- On or around 14 of December 1944, in a speech to the commanders of his regiment, had ordered civilians to be treated ruthlessly and that no prisoners were to be taken.
- 2) On or around 18 December 1944 near Cheneux, Belgium allowed a prisoner of war to be fired on in his presence.
- 3) On or about 19 December 1944 at Stoumont, allowed a prisoner of war to be shot.
- 4) On or about 19 December 1944 at Stoumont, Belgium,

- allowed prisoners of war to be shot in his presence.
- 5) On or about 23 December 1944 at La Gleize, allowed prisoners of war to be shot.
- 6) On or about 23 January 1945 at Petit Thier allowed a prisoner of war to be shot.
- 7) Was responsible for the shooting of prisoners of war and Allied civilians by the men of his regiment and his Kampfgruppe during the period from 16 December 1944 to 13 January 1945.4

Each of the accused in Dachau was confronted with one or several of similarly formulated charges. The men of Panzergruppe Peiper were supposed to have shot down American soldiers and Belgian civilians not only at the Baugnez crossroads, but also at other places in Belgium. The accusations were only presented to the 74 men on 11 April 1946 and this was also the first time the defense was given access to them.

While the defense was given three weeks to prepare for the trial which was to be carried out according to American law, the prosecution had been given a period of ten months. Defense counsel was only allowed to speak to the accused during the final days of April. They then had a hard time getting past the justified mistrust of the prisoners who had too often experienced First Lieutenant Pearl and others as supposed defenders during the fake trials. Here too, they suspected yet another trick on the part of the interrogation officers.

The trial was presided over by Brigadier General Josiah Dalbey; the prosecution was led by the Chief Prosecutor, Lieutenant Colonel Burton Ellis, who had been a tax attorney up until 1942 and who had never taken a criminal case before a court, and his friends from Schwäbisch Hall. The American defender was Colonel Willis Everett.

With respect to the issue of German orders during the Ardennes Offensive, Chief Prosecutor Ellis claimed:

We will show that a guideline existed for this offensive to take revenge for the so-called terror bombing by shooting prisoners and unarmed civilians and, in this way break, any resistance. SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, commanded by the accused Peiper, passed the order on to his subordinate units, that this battle must be waged without mercy, without consideration for Allied prisoners of war, who were to be shot, if the situation required. This order was read to the battalion commanders who in turn passed it on to their soldiers through their company commanders. This order allowed the units to believe that they could ignore the provisions of the Geneva Convention and go unpunished and they could fight as they had done earlier on the Russian Front.<sup>8</sup>

To support the existence of this false order, the former SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Kramm, orderly officer for the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, acted as a witness for the prosecution. The American Chief defender, Colonel Willis Everett, countered his testimony:

Witness Kramm made a very singular impression during his examination – that of a sick man. He appeared to be a serious psychopath ... Because the prosecution was unable to produce evidence to show that Peiper had given oral orders to his commanders, they claimed that a written order had been issued which had demanded a hard, ruthless advance during the offensive. Nevertheless, they were unable to prove it.

Kramm claimed to have read the regimental order for the Panzer regiment during the afternoon of 15 December 1944. In fact, however, it was not written until the night of 15/16 December 1944 and contained no reference to the treatment of prisoners and civilians. Kramm wore dark sun glasses during the trial so that he wouldn't have to look into the eyes of his comrades sitting opposite on the benches of the accused. The declarations by the accused, obtained under torture at Schwäbisch Hall, with regard to the order which the Americans claimed was issued, but which never existed, were retracted in the court room, as was Jochen Peiper's. "... From the beginning, I said that it was completely untrue."

After each day of the trial, the men were brought back to the bunker barracks in Dachau. Jochen Peiper was there, together with his former orderly officer, Arndt Fischer, who remembered:

Naturally, we discussed everything. At no time did he show any bitterness towards his men or subordinates. He had often said that during every interrogation he offered to assume full responsibility for any possible violation of the laws of war, provided that his men were cleared. At that time we were still not completely acquainted with the practice of the victor's justice and the effects of the third degree ... The cells were as small as rabbit hutches. Two men in a hole. The beds were one above the other, and you couldn't sit up in bed. Next to the beds there was just enough room so that you could get to the door. But it only lasted for two months, and it became rapidly obvious what they intended to do to us. It was easy to figure out that, after the torture we experienced, they wouldn't allow us to survive as eyewitnesses of such practices by the victors. 13

One of the most important accusations during the trial was the alleged shooting of prisoners of war at the Baugnez crossroads. The prosecution produced four survivors of the incident at the crossroads. They had prepared First Lieutenant Virgil Lary with particular intensity. At the question, who on 17 December 1944 had fired the first pistol shot at the group of prisoners in the field at the Baugnez crossroads, he got up out of the witness chair and went straight across to the accused Georg Fleps. With baffling certainty, he identified him as the one who fired the shot. It would have been impossible for him to identify Fleps so quickly. He was a loader in a tank and Lary could only have seen him for a few seconds, if at all, at a great distance in the loader's hatch. In Schwäbisch Hall they had previously shown him Fleps through the peep hole in his cell, so that he would be able to recognize him at the trial. When Lary explained in his testimony that he had yelled to the men standing next to him in the field to "Stand fast!", he admitted at least indirectly to an escape attempt on the part of some of the Americans. The prosecution, however, ignored this intentionally.

Jochen Peiper was also implicated by Lary: "I was also shown to First Lieutenant Lary, a survivor at the crossroads and chief witness for the prosecution, who was able to identify the accused Fleps with such total certainty in the court room. Mr. Lary also recognized me at first glance as the perpetrator at the crossroads. Moreover, he claimed that I had fired at him twice with my pistol at "a range of five yards." <sup>14</sup> Any comment here would be superfluous. Even the prosecution never claimed that Peiper had fired shots at the crossroads. When it became clearly evident that Peiper was not present when the shots were fired,

the prosecution changed its tactics to concentrate on other points in its case.

He was confronted with the alleged shooting of civilians. It had been stated in numerous sworn depositions that during the Ardennes Offensive Belgian partisans, especially at Stavelot, had committed acts which were flagrant violations of international law and the rules of war. They had fired from roof tops and windows at the open SPW of the SPW-Bataillon, SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 and at other vehicles of the Panzergruppe as they passed through Stavelot, resulting in killed and wounded. In addition, at Stavelot Belgian civilians in civilian clothes acted as snipers, shooting at German soldiers from ambush positions. On the German side there was no response to these acts in the speed of the battle. It reveals a profound professional military understanding on the part of the prosecution when you hear questions such as the following which were asked during Peiper's trial:

Question: Did you see that an 80-year-old woman was shooting at you from a window?

Answer: In the brief time available, I was unable to determine the age of the person firing at me.

Question: Did you ever see a year-old baby shooting out of a window in Bülingen?

Answer: No, I have never seen a one-year-old baby shooting, not even in Russia. 15

If the reader watches the existing film of this testimony, you will see that Peiper himself answered these totally absurd questions professionally and without making a face.

Finally, the fabricated confessions, which had been obtained by psychological and physical torture in Schwäbisch Hall, were entirely repudiated in the Dachau court room. In the case of former SS-Untersturmführer Hans Hennecke, the means with which these confessions had been extorted came up openly.

Question: Hennecke, do you remember having signed and sworn to a statement on 13 March (1946) which the prosecution has produced as exhibit No. 78?

Answer: I wrote this statement on 13 March 1946.

Question: And this statement contains the truth, does it?

Answer: It is a pack of lies from beginning to end.

Question: Why did you write it?

Answer: Because First Lieutenant Pearl, a member of the prosecution, had said that he would be my defender in the trial and reinforced that statement with his word of honor as an officer in the presence of Obersturmführer Rumpf and Untersturmführer Reiser. He told me that my only chance to save my neck depended on writing down what I wrote. And it is humanly understandable that you would write such a thing, if you had already been waiting for 48 hours to be hanged ...

Question: Hennecke, did you really believe in Schwäbisch Hall that First Lieutenant Pearl was your defender?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Did you believe that in all seriousness?

Answer: Yes, certainly. 16

As it gradually began to dawn as to what methods the interrogation officers had used in Schwäbisch Hall, Pearl, Shoemaker and others were called to the witness stand and asked about their interrogation methods and the abuse in Schwäbisch Hall. As

was to be expected, they vigorously denied any wrongdoing. <sup>17</sup> Their statements were believed, but not those of the accused nor those of their defenders.

Jochen Peiper made an impression in his testimony in Dachau by his clear, precise statements. He sat in the witness chair extremely composed and disciplined during his examination and calmly and coolly answered the questions of the prosecution. If you watch him during the available hours of film which the Americans made during the trial, you can see Peiper sitting in the witness chair with his lips pressed together into a narrow line as he has to listen to the accusations and forced confessions of his comrades and himself. His bearing was described by the disinterested persons present as impressive. Peiper answered an accusation by the prosecutor, Ellis, as follows: "I have never been concerned as to whether something was to my advantage or not. Once Peiper corrected the translator, because she hadn't correctly translated one of Ellis' sentences.

In the evening after a day of trial, Peiper talked for hours with Arndt Fischer in the narrow barracks.

We didn't just talk about the daily progress of the trial. For example, he once told me that he had worked on the idea of a regimental march song. In this connection, I heard the following verses for the first time from his mouth:

Once we rode in flames to Valhalla,

They asked us for our invitation,

Then we called out with much laughter:

We're from the Leibstandarte;

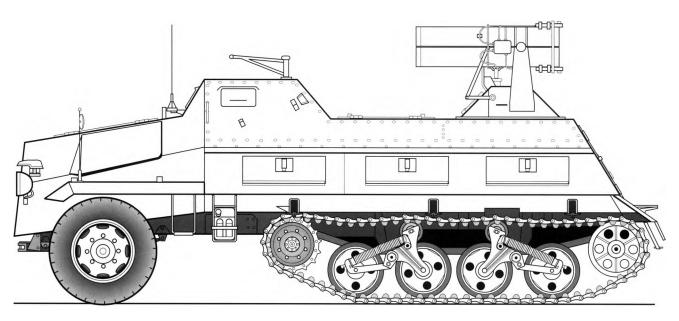
And one said softly that he'd known us for a long time -

They're from the 1st Panzer-Regiment.

I remember the text so well because I printed it with the stub of a pencil on one of the boards of our bunks (for subsequent generations). I wonder if anyone ever read it? 21

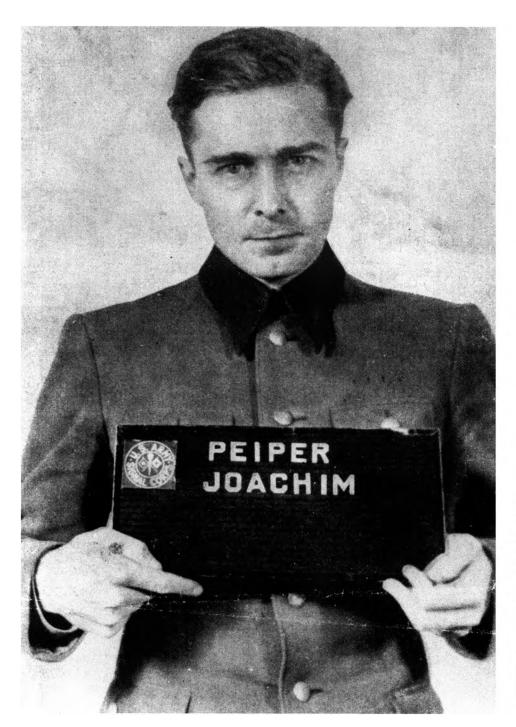
The appearance of Lieutenant Colonel Hal McCown, who had been a prisoner of the Panzergruppe in La Gleize and who portrayed Peiper, his officers and men as he had known them, turned into an embarrassing affair for the prosecution. He did not confirm any shooting of prisoners in La Gleize. This honest officer was then labeled an enemy collaborator by the Americans. But his statements and the record of them went into history and present a truthful picture of Peiper and his men, as McCown saw them in La Gleize. Some of his testimony has already been quoted in the chapter on the Ardennes Offensive.<sup>22</sup>

Since the Malmedy trial only represents a portion of Peiper's life, it is not possible in this biography to give a detailed description of this unique trial because of the number of available documents. The date of sentencing was set for 16 July 1946. After a deliberation of some two hours and 20 minutes, which meant less than two minutes for each of the accused, the accused were called before the judge in order. Peiper was fully aware of the sentence he could expect. "Joachim Peiper, after due deliberation and agreement among not less than two thirds of those voting present, the court sentences you to death by hanging. The time and place of execution will be determined by the high command." 23 All 73 accused were found guilty and a total of 43 of them were sentenced to death, 22 to life imprisonment, two to 20 years imprisonment, one to 15 years imprisonment, and five to 10 years imprisonment. During the trial the Alsatian, Marcel Boltz, was handed over to the French as a French citizen and was released after examination before a court in Mühlhausen (Alsace).



Open "Maultier" 15cm Panzerwerfer 42

Courtesy of George Bradford





The accused received placards with numbers. Peiper (in front with No. 42), Hennecke (left, No. 23), and Münkemer (No. 39).



The Malmedy trial started on 16 April at Dachau. View of the accused.





Peiper in the witness stand, translator on the left.



The investigating and interrogation officers from Schwäbisch Hall represented the prosecution at Dachau. From the left: Kirschbaum, Byrne, Ellowitz, Pearl, Thon, Shoemaker, and chief prosecutor Ellis.



Peiper is summoned by the judge.



During a break in the proceedings.



Sepp Dietrich, Fritz Kraemer, Hermann Prieß and Jochen Peiper.



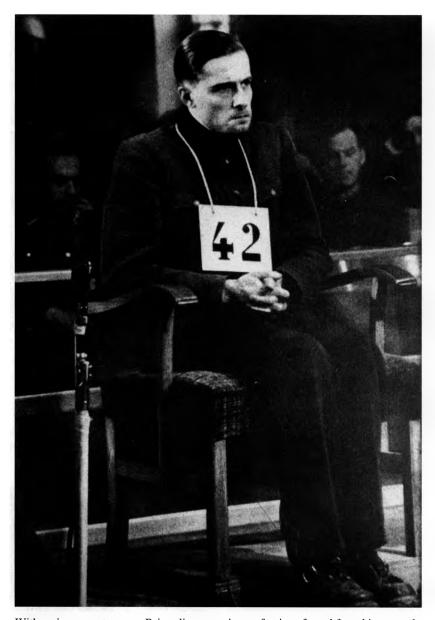
Peiper with the chief American defense counsel, Colonel Willis Everett (middle).



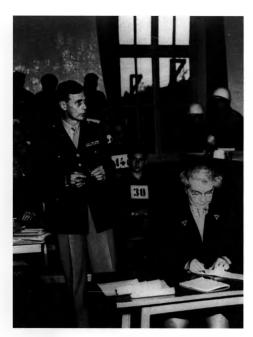
Mrs. Sigurd Peiper and Mrs. Ursula Dietrich attended the trial against their husbands for a few days in May 1946.



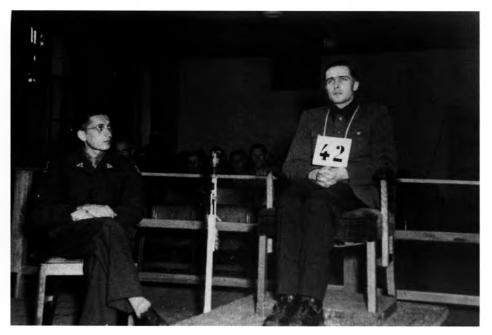
SS-Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich (standing), commander-in-chief of the 6. SS-Panzer-Armee. Peiper is on the right.



With an iron countenance, Peiper listens to the confessions forced from his comrades.



The American defense counsel, Colonel Willis Everett, continued to help the men even after their sentencing at the expense of his own health.



Peiper in the witness chair; translator to the left.



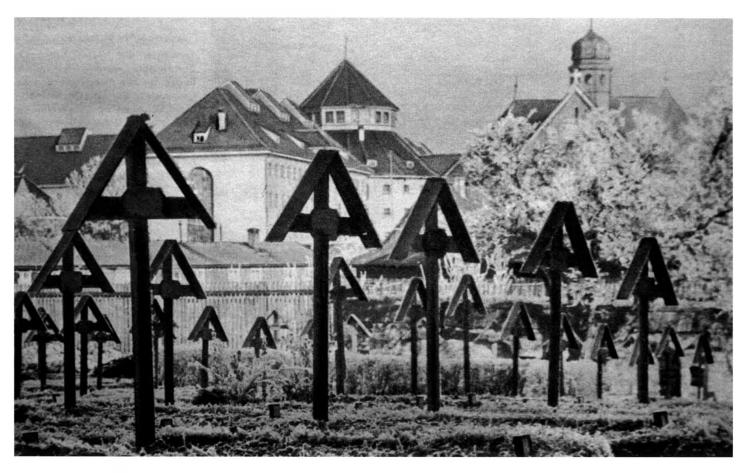
Peiper during testimony during the Malmedy trial at Dachau. The translator is in front of him.



16 July 1946: Peiper received the sentence in front of the judge – death by hanging. Right: the American defense counsel, Colonel Everett.



Official photo from the prison files. The number "99" was Peiper's number at Landsberg.



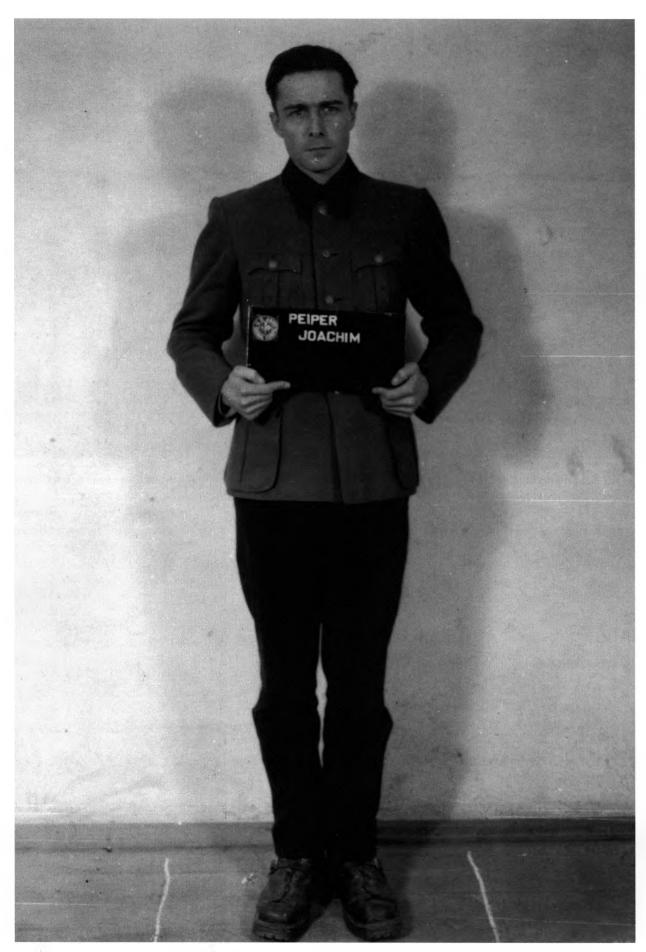
The fortress of Landsberg am Lech, the place where Peiper was imprisoned starting in the summer of 1946 and where hundreds of German soldiers and civilians were executed by the American occupation force. View of the graves at the prison cemetery.



Until January 1951, Peiper expected to be executed at Landsberg.



Jochen Peiper in October 1949 – still on death row at Landsberg.



Peiper at the end of 1945 in the prison at Schwäbisch Hall, where the Americans conducted their preliminary investigations with physical and psychological torture and tricks in order to obtain enough material for the Malmedy Trial.

## **Prison Years in Landsberg**

On 17 July 1946 Peiper was transported with others who had been sentenced to Landsberg am Lech in Bavaria, where the Americans had established their War Criminal Prison No. 1 in the large building of the fortress on the Hindenburg Ring. It seemed his fate was sealed. His hair was cut and he was taken to the baths. After that he was issued a jacket, a shirt, a pair of shoes, a pair of socks, underwear and a handkerchief. Peiper was then locked in a death cell, for all those who were sentenced to death were put in individual cells. In the cell there was a folding table attached to the wall, a folding bench and a shelf opposite the bed which was folded up against the wall during the day. The barred window opposite the door had been boarded over on the bottom and the top was provided with artificial glass. A bucket served for a toilet which was removed every morning at 0500 hours. Then the prisoner received ersatz coffee and a slice of bread. Occasionally, the bread had something on it. The bed was folded up onto the wall and locked in place, so that Peiper could only sit on the folding bench. After the hours before lunch had passed, he was given porridge or potatoes or something similar through the flap in the door along with an aluminum spoon. Those sentenced to death received no utensils or plates. Speech was strictly forbidden, and those sitting in the death cells were not permitted to leave them and had no physical exercise.1

The sentence in the Malmedy trial gave the Americans and the other victorious Allied powers the basis for their intention to criminalize the entire Waffen-SS and designate it as a "criminal organization" by the military court at the Nuremberg trials. For every soldier of the Waffen-SS, virtually a million men from all of Europe, the Malmedy trial was a major factor in the discrimination and defamation offered against this organization today. Self-appointed critics accuse the entire Waffen-SS of the incident at the Malmedy crossroads - along with other untenable accusations - without bothering to get a more exact account of the actual events. When the news of the sentences passed by the Malmedy trial became known during the Nuremberg Trials the former Chief of the Wehrmacht High Command, Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel, and the Chief of the Command Staff of the Wehrmacht, Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, were unsettled. During the lunch break in the trials on 18 July 1946 Keitel stated, "Peiper was a good officer." Jodl confirmed that it was impossible that Sepp Dietrich, whom he regarded as an honorable soldier, would have prepared and issued any order for shooting prisoners of war. He, Jodl, or Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt would have had to have known about it and would never have stood for it.2

In Peiper's death cell the light was on for 24 hours with no break. As a condemned man, he had to wear a red jacket, so that later the condemned men were referred to as red jackets. Peiper and the others condemned to death were not allowed to work; they were only to sit in their cells and wait to be hanged. The hangings of prisoners condemned to death in other trials conducted by the victorious American power resumed in Landsberg in September 1946 after a pause since May 1946. No one will ever be able to know what thoughts tormented Peiper's mind and what spiritual torment he suffered during these long weeks. "Nameless, heart-stopping fear, when on Thursday afternoon their steps turned into our corridor, when the lock rattled on the neighboring cell. A chair fell over inside, but there was no outcry. And then they went on by with him." A condemned man described this:

In September I experienced the first hanging personally. The guards had latched the food flaps shut, so we crouched in our cells. Then we could hear the rattle of keys. Somewhere a cell was opened, someone was pulled out and marched along the prison corridor. Then a voice cried out: "Farewell, my friends!" For a while we only heard the steps fading in the distance and suddenly the entire death wing sang: "I Had a Comrade."

The singing penetrated throughout the building and the guards whipped from cell to cell banging on the cell doors from the outside with clubs to silence the singing, but everyone was singing. They weren't allowed to open up the cells, so we sang all three verses ... <sup>4</sup>

On the morning of the day of the hanging, always a Friday, the prisoner in the death cell was read his sentence once more. Then he was stripped and examined by a doctor to be sure that he had hidden nothing in a body orifice. Without underwear, dressed only with black trousers and a red jacket, he then went for his last walk to the gallows. There were initially one and later on two box-like gallows erected in the court yard, to which the condemned man, already in chains, had to climb 13 steps. Once he was standing up there on the trap door under the noose, his legs were also bound. After that he had a minute and a half to say any last words, before a hood was pulled over his head. The preacher spoke and, at the "amen," the trap opened and the man dropped for two meters. After that, he remained for about ten minutes inside the box, hanging on the rope. Even badly wounded men, e.g., Luftwaffe Hauptmann and Knight's Cross winner Noack, who had had a leg amputated, fell prey to the hangman. As Noack couldn't walk, he was tied to a board, hauled up the steps and hanged. This was the year-long sorry reality in Landsberg.5

On 15 September 1946 Peiper wrote in a letter to his parents:

Fourteen months have passed since the great shipwreck and, full of amazement over their miraculous rescue, the survivors climb back up the beach of destiny and try, in spite of the continuing storm, to sink new roots. As the wounds are still too fresh, we should not stir up all the pain which we had to go through and must still bear today with stories! ... The good conscience from duty idealistically embraced and carried out to the utmost limit gives me a certain serenity and philosophical peace ...

Live happily, fight bravely, and die smiling. This was always my motto facing the enemy! Yesterday, and today as well. What could possibly still frighten me today after all those experiences? Separation from the outside world brings with it a strong spiritualization and you build reverently on the altar of memory where episodes believed long forgotten are brought back into clearer light!<sup>6</sup>

Peiper was not given an oral or written justification for his sentence. The American attorney, Colonel Willis Everett, and also German attorneys, such as Peiper's defender Dr. Eugen Leer in Munich, were trying to save the lives of those condemned to death. As an appeal against the sentence was not possible because of the Four Power Agreement, Everett had no other choice than an appeal for mercy. On 28 December 1946 he presented an appeal for clemency to the War Crimes Group, which then appointed a commission to examine the sentences.

Jochen Peiper himself bore the certainty that he would end on the gallows in the near future with the iron discipline of the soldier and even tried to console his family members who were suffering with him. After two months in the Landsberg death cell, he wrote his parents: "Do you believe that an old tank colonel could ever ask the enemy for mercy?" 7

Peiper was not allowed visitors, and he was only permitted to write a certain number of letters, which were all subject to censure. He literally devoured the letters and packages from his wife and parents, as they represented his only limited contact with the outside world. "Like a child under a Christmas tree, I always opened them full of curiosity and excitement and then sunk myself in their contents with joy and peace." During this period other prisoners were hanged and Peiper had to constantly expect that he too would be required one Thursday to prepare himself to be hanged on the following day. He spent his first Christmas in the gloomy fortress of Landsberg in 1946. In a letter written by him for Christmas, he reveals the inner person as few had ever seen him before:

My dear parents,

Christmas! What magic there is in this single word and what memories it awakens! Old hearts become young again and even the most incorrigible scalawag is unable to avoid this effect. It is the feast for the children, and how right this is! For what married couple doesn't spend that evening with the children, for the children, and what lonely elderly man doesn't revert back for a few hours to that lost wonderland, that paradise of childhood. In the relatively short time between my leaving home and now, fate has given me an unusually full life full of riches, experience, and adventure. I have been permitted to taste the precious feeling of the first Christmas eve at my own hearth, I have played Santa Claus in the trenches. On 24 December I was permitted to keep watch for Germany far in the east in my tank and during the Holy Night of 1944 I swam through the icy flood of a raging icy river with my brave companions in a desperate breakout from a closing ring. A shot-up hand and a drowning man clutching at my pants leg didn't make that situation any easier for me.

The outside storm is now over. My steel squadrons have now ceased to furrow the blood-soaked battlefield, and I am no longer subject to Mars' fickle moods. For a year it has become peaceful around me and within me. The ability to stop and look back has made me thoughtful and taught me the value of memory. Is it then any wonder, that Christmas Eve permits you to become a child again and my thoughts go out to you with particular affection while old springs, which were believed to have dried up, begin to flow again? When you sit broken hearted and silent in the gloomy atmosphere of your wretched shelter on Christmas Eve, try to forget the hopeless present for once!

Light a candle, toast a fir twig, and then close your eyes and go back over your unhappy lives and bring together the sparks and candle lights lying strewn about into a beaming, precious bouquet, into a Christmas tree whose inner light no one can take away from you! Nothing was in vain! Never forget it. At Rottach, a new generation is growing up and life goes on. Pass the evening comfortably in a warm room. Find peace and quiet and stay healthy for me. If we can already express our wishes for 1947, I have very few! Go into the New Year straight and tall. I remain in loyal love and affection,

Your Achim9

Peiper used the name Achim only in letters to his parents, who in the mean time were living at Fuldaer Landstraße 15 in Salmünster in the Schlüchtern District of Hessia.

Peiper bore the torment of waiting for the unavoidable with

great seriousness. He wrote: "From the perspective of my cell, I looked out at this planet gone mad with my unique sarcasm and contempt." 10 Peiper appeared to have no great illusions concerning his fate. In July 1947 he described his prospects with a choice of words typical of him. "In my position you either go crazy or become a philosopher. I hope to develop my mind along the latter path ... I stay informed, read many significant books, look for the microbes of human stupidity, and wait with a smile for the great "Hanging Party." 11 Peiper found his greatest moral support in his wife, Sigurd, who continued to live with the three children at Rottach-Egern. "Gallant, courageous, and unflinching, my wife follows her painful way, for she is my best friend and a part of me. She will never strike her colors and she is too proud to take help from strangers." 12 This is an example of the love between two people enduring under the heaviest of burdens. These were the trials which many couples had to endure during that period. Frau Peiper lived entirely from her belief in goodness and the hope that a benevolent Providence would somehow save her man for her. After 1947 she could visit Jochen in Landsberg once a month and talk to him there for an hour, separated by a wire mesh. 13

The idea that he had to wait helplessly in Landsberg for the end to come, while his wife and children had to make their way in life alone, was a severe burden to Peiper. Thoughts of his elderly parents added to this, to whom he wrote: "It is a great burden to me ... that your last child has to inflict even more pain and sorrow on you." His father Woldemar had confidence in him: "Moreover, I have been richly blessed by Providence that I have a son like my Joachim ..." 15

On 20 October 1947 the Deputy Judge Advocate for War Crimes and on 4 February 1948 the War Crimes Board of Review presented investigative reports concerning the sentences from the Malmedy trial. After the Commander-in-Chief of the American occupying power in Germany, General Lucius Clay, had reviewed the reports of the investigating officials, he reinstated only 12 of the 43 death sentences, including Peiper's, on 8 April 1948. He ordered that those under sentence of death be hanged on 20 May 1948. It now seemed that Peiper's life was finally over. The German press gave detailed reports of these renewed sentences. <sup>16</sup>

Colonel Everett immediately submitted a writ of habeas corpus, requesting an additional stay of execution for Peiper and his companions. Although the Supreme Court rejected the petition, they set up a commission to review the sentences once again. But day after day passed and Peiper gradually approached the gallows. On 19 May 1948, one day before his appointed execution, the Secretary of the Army, Kenneth C. Royal, stopped the executions. Peiper saw a thin hope that he would once again escape the hangman, especially since thirteen of his friends, including some sentenced to death, had already been released from Landsberg on 10 April 1948.

A three-man commission consisting of Judge Gordon Simpson of the Texas Supreme Court, Edward L. van Roden from Media, Pennsylvania and Lieutenant General Charles Lawrence Jr. began work for which they established an office in Munich. They not only reviewed the sentences reinstated by General Clay, but also the 139 existing death sentences pronounced by the Americans at the Dachau trials. This review came far too late for 152 men. They had already been executed by the American hangmen at Landsberg. On 26 November 1948 16 men were hanged, including SS-Untersturmführer Karl Kirchner of the 12. SS-Panzer-

Division "Hitlerjugend." In the period from October to December 1948 alone, 110 men were hanged at Landsberg.

On 18 December 1948 the National Council for the Prevention of War in Washington wrote:

The Germans who have not yet been hanged should be given a reprieve until a complete judicial inquiry into their cases can be conducted. The American examining magistrates, who abused their powers as victors and who trampled on justice in the fullest sense of the word, should be branded preferably in a public trial, preferably in the United States of America. The American investigating magistrates should be indicted for incitement to perjury and misfeasance. <sup>17</sup>

In their Munich office, the three investigators spoke with over 100 men, including the Catholic Archbishop of Munich and Freising and Dr. Wurm, the Bishop of Stuttgart. Other high religious dignitaries intervened on the behalf of Peiper, his comrades and those adjudges in other trials. On 29 October and 1 November 1948 Bishop Dr. Wurm and Cardinal Frings respectively telegraphed President Truman in an effort to get him to stop the judicial murder in Landsberg. Munich's bishop-at-large, Johannes Neuhäusler, asked General Clay for a judicial review leading to a new trial. He spoke out against the execution of the sentences in a radio message on 25 October 1948, but the Americans forbade its transmission. 18

On 5 May 1949 Judge van Roden stated officially that fake trials and coercion had been used to obtain confessions on which the sentences were based. He was of the opinion that the 12 existing death sentences should be converted to life imprisonment as "he was unconvinced of their guilt from the record." <sup>19</sup> The results of the investigations were published in both the American and German press. The commission, which was named after Simpson, unmasked the American procedures during the trial and pre-trial investigation and stated in its final report that the men,

... had been subjected to un-American methods of the third degree to force them to confess. Hoods which were still bloody from the blows others had received were pulled over the heads of the suspects, so that, without seeing anything, they could be brought to a fake trial that many believed to be genuine where they were "sentenced" ... After the prisoners had been "sentenced" to death, they were offered an opportunity to escape with a lighter sentence if they would sign a confession. Judge van Roden found that recalcitrant prisoners were so badly beaten that doctors and dentists had to work overtime on broken jaw bones and loose teeth. The report even mentioned cases when the American interrogators disguised themselves as priests or pastors in order to obtain confessions in this way ... <sup>20</sup>

The Simpson Commission recommended that the 12 death sentences be overturned, but this was not done. The results of this investigation carried out by recognized, famous jurists, which was also given publication in the United States, released a wave of protests against these continuing unjust sentences. A letter signed by 25 German bishops asked the United States Military Administration in Germany:

Won't the tortures during the interrogations at Schwäbisch Hall and at Oberursel and the mass hangings at Landsberg one day cause victorious America more harm than a lost battle? When the survivors of the martyrdom of the heat waves at Oberursel are released, they will be able to tell the world in detail about the inhuman treatment meted out to them there.<sup>21</sup>

In January 1949 a new review took place. The National Council for the Prevention of War in Washington urged that the sentences be revoked and that proceedings be initiated against the interrogating officers. Colonel Everett was tireless in his efforts to further delay the sentences from being carried out so as to gain time for additional investigations and the presentation of new evidence. On 16 March 1949 General Clay received instructions from Secretary Royal not to allow the sentences to be carried out before he reviewed the files. Clay then reviewed the death sentences which he himself had approved the year before, and commuted six of the 12 existing death sentences to life imprisonment on 8 April 1949. Clay confirmed Jochen Peiper's death sentence with the justification: "After excluding all the renounced statements, there remained sufficient uncontested evidence to identify him as a participant in the killing of an unarmed American soldier by his driver Zwigart. Because of his high rank, this alone is sufficient to justify the death penalty."22

On 5 October 1950 the defense presented the Modification Board with a brief in which Clay's statement was refuted. After General Clay had raised the incident at Cheneux with Diefenthal's SPW driver Paul Zwigart as the main reason for further confirmation of the death sentence, Peiper's defense again obtained four sworn statements from Knittel, Friedrichs, Weiss and Fachelmeyer, a joint sworn declaration with a sketch by Diefenthal, Knittel and Peiper, as well as renewed repudiations by Assenmacher and Rineck.<sup>23</sup>

In the meantime, more voices were raised in the United States for the lifting of the unjust Dachau sentences, and the United States Senate established an investigating committee under the chairmanship of Senator Raymond Baldwin. The committee examined the interrogation practices at Schwäbisch Hall and the confessions obtained there. The prosecutor, Burton Ellis, was examined by members of the investigating committee and Senator McCarthy on 20 April 1949 concerning the methods used by him and his interrogation officers in Schwäbisch Hall. He denied that the prisoners were kept in solitary confinement, denied the abuse, the fake trials and the threats, until the committee read out the statement by the court stenographer James J. Bailey (from Pittsburgh):

The methods used by the interpreters to obtain confessions were such that after a period of 10 weeks, I couldn't stand it any more, and asked for a transfer back to the United States ... I was present in cells where there was only a small table covered with a black cloth and a crucifix with two candles on it. When the prisoner was brought in he dropped unconscious to the floor, whereby his nose hit the concrete floor of the cell and his face became a bloody mess ... I saw the use of physical violence. Threats of mutilation, and even of death, were used in order to obtain these so-called confessions. <sup>24</sup>

In Senator McCarthy's hearings, the former tax attorney Ellis confessed that before his entry into the United States Army in 1942 he had had no experience in criminal cases and had never presented a criminal case before a court. Senator McCarthy commented:

"The US Army must be condemned for sending a man there with no qualifications for conducting a case involving criminal penalties." <sup>25</sup> However, the Senate committee was hindered in its work by influential forces and when Senator McCarthy discovered that the chairman of the committee, Senator Baldwin, was a

law partner of Major Fenton, who had participated in the interrogations of 1945/46 and was an accused, he left the committee. In addition, Senator Kefauver, who also was a member of the committee, had professional connections with Captain Ralph Shoemaker, one of investigators at Schwäbisch Hall who struck prisoners. Despite that the Baldwin Committee continued to hold hearings and investigate in the United States and Germany. Peiper's attorney, Dr. Leer, handed over all the sworn statements of the condemned and the witnesses to the committee concerning the circumstances of the confessions and their repudiation.

On 14 October 1949 the Baldwin Committee reported the results of its investigations to the American Senate. The chief defender during the trial, Willis Everett, worked tirelessly in Atlanta during those years to get a review of the unjust sentences. He sacrificed his health and his fortune to rescue the Malmedy Boys, as he called Peiper's men, from the noose. He informed the Modification Board on 5 October 1950 that, among other things, the Dachau court was an ad hoc tribunal, whose procedural principles were determined exclusively by Allied Control Council Law No. 10 of 20 December 1945 and that its jurisdiction was a violation of the United States Constitution. Despite that nothing happened and the hangings at Landsberg continued.

Even in 1951, years after the founding of the supposedly sovereign Federal Republic of Germany, the American occupation forces continued to hang former German soldiers in Landsberg according to the sentences that they had handed out. From December 1945 to June 1951, 306 men were killed by the American occupying power at Landsberg.26 The threatening shadow of the gallows continued to loom over Jochen Peiper's death cell. Every week in which further hangings were conducted, he had to count on being one of the sacrifices. The number of crosses in the Landsberg prison cemetery increased. It was known in advance that the hangings were going to take place. Often the men sitting in their cells would hear those condemned to death in other trials wish them good-by on their last walk through the corridors of the prison to the gallows. Werner Braune, who died from the noose on 6 June 1951, shouted "Comrades, long live Germany!" Really, no one can say what Peiper and his companions in fate thought during those hours, what spiritual torment these men suffered and what damage resulted to their minds and souls.

Nowhere has anyone described what the wives of these condemned men accomplished in these bitter years. These were women who, in most cases, were left to survive on their own with their children. Frau Peiper worked as a representative of the Henkel Company. In September 1948 she wrote: "For more than three years my husband has been kept in solitary confinement and has always had to expect the worst, but there is still hope, and we cling to that ... We have become so modest, but I really mustn't grumble, since in my small kingdom I still have a home and really live like a queen. Everything could have been so wonderful!!" 27

Sigurd Peiper kept a home together for her children and didn't allow them to know of the oppressive accusations around Jochen. The oldest daughter, Elke, remembered:

Because of her life experiences and her inner maturity, she was able to give us three children a happy and carefree childhood in a beautiful and cultivated home, in which we only experienced her troubles and cares on the periphery and without understanding why. She didn't want to expose us either to the difficulties of daily life or to her struggle for Papa or the humiliations to which she

was exposed, as she was convinced that a happy childhood was the best foundation for life. For us, her children, she was the unsurpassable model of optimism and indomitable spirit, for she had found out that life is what you make of it and not what it makes of us. <sup>28</sup>

During those years, in contrast to the present, the German press gave generally objective reports concerning the sentenced German soldiers, including Peiper and those who shared his sufferings. After visiting Frau Peiper, a reporter for an illustrated paper wrote:

After ringing twice as is the custom, two children raced down the stairs from the attic and tore open the door to the house ... Their call brought their mother, the wife of the SS-Commander Joachim Peiper, who has been under sentence of death for almost five years. She stopped, hesitated, then approached. Before I could even say a word: "Please, no interviews." Even so, we started to talk. Her answers were rapid, concise and well thought out. In no word or remark did she reveal for one second the sentimentality of the anxious wife and mother.

It was a self-evident, modest courage, an intentional elimination of all depressing thoughts, that characterized this woman. "You see, I have my three children, and with them, God knows, enough to do. The oldest Elke, is now in school at the Oberschule at Lake Tegern, and it turns out that all three have to be in school at different times. If the small ones go at eight, the older one has to leave at half past twelve, and that keeps me moving." And after a brief pause no longer than a second, "Thank God, everyone is behaving decently in front of the children." The children, the small quarters in this large house belonging to a befriended family, the bills with the paltry prisoner of war income, these are the daily cares which hourly weigh on Frau Peiper. "So, in any case, there is little time for regrets."

For Frau Peiper, the Peiper case is no question of clemency, but a fight for justice. She is so firmly convinced of his innocence that she refuses to discuss it. "There is enough evidence to free my husband. All he needs is a fair trial." Everything else she leaves to her husband's defender, the Munich attorney Dr. Eugen Leer." I can't do anything more than he does ... We were only married in 1939, then the war came, and my husband was home for three weeks a year at the most. Since 1945 ..." The woman broke off sharply. We are not deceiving ourselves. If my husband comes home, we will have a hard time making it through the next year. He is going to have to start over from the beginning. Still, I really mustn't grumble. Others, especially the refugees, have it a lot worse." As far as she was concerned, there was no possibility that her husband wouldn't come home.<sup>29</sup>

Jochen Peiper's mother Charlotte died on 15 February 1949 at Gelnhausen. In spite of a request, Jochen Peiper was not allowed to attend his mother's burial <sup>30</sup>. After the death of his wife, Peiper's father Woldemar moved from Salmünster to Unterschondorf am Ammersee, where his brother, Georg, lived.

The philosophical depths in Peiper's thoughts are revealed in his letters to his closest friends in his unit, as in one written to his former orderly officer Kurt Köchlin in the fall of 1948:

Although I have absolutely no inclination to be either a monk or a martyr, I have managed to attain an enviable sense of balance. From my forward observation post, the rotating ship of fools can be beautifully watched through a reversed telescope. Full of fatalistic peace and serenity, I search for the microbes of human stupidity. I am now already in the sixth semester, ironing out the various gaps in my education, and I find once more that irony is the grain of salt which mainly makes it possible to bear that which is put on the table. In other words: I have changed little and I have pretty much remained as I was ...

After the many admonitions which are always provided for my own good – such as: Head up! Self control! Don't let your spirits down! etc. (exactly like the old times when superiors in the rear, per telephone, encouraged you to attack) – your friendly letter had such a true and loyal tone, that it had to find an echo; even if contrary winds influence the release of a trial balloon. Writing in my situation is such an odd thing. We are really all actors! But the dying man is only too willing to play his role. He believes that every line must be framed to influence posterity, which will cause the person addressed, influenced by the obituary, to do his duty.

In spite of the fact that my ambitions don't lie in that direction, and I couldn't care less about posterity, I still write letters ... And then, old friend there is still my family. A joy which nothing can disturb, a source of inner strength, and a process of inner maturity stimulated by time, which to describe would be profane. If really I am a king only in my dreams, my riches in this regard are of such undeserved size, that now as then, I must consider myself the most favored of the gods, and I can only wish similar good fortune in your family.

The most powerful is he who has dominance over himself; and I am happy that you are there. I count on you. For eventually, we will once again build something together and then this cozy relationship with the sword of Damocles will no longer have any interest for me as we will have taken a completely different direction!<sup>31</sup>

Peiper's ability to see the brighter side of his life – in and of itself unbearable – is revealed in another letter. The reader can recognize his unbendable will.

When you consider the fact that I have passed my fourth birth-day in "splendid isolation," things are going much better than expected. Naturally, the astral body has become a little tired and weak with time, and Praxitales would cover his face in pain upon seeing my atrophied extremities, but what's important is that my head is more unbowed than ever. The development from the resentful Achilles through Don Quixote to Diogenes was naturally not entirely a painless transformation. When you don't take yourself too seriously, it's the same triviality as "on the outside." Nothing which happens to you yourself is unbearable. I have seen too much of life not to be able to laugh at it. For a thinking man, it's a comedy and for a sensitive man, a tragedy — Cogito! 32

Even in the death cell Peiper expressed his spiritual force on paper – pregnant, highly polished prose – and used it to please and motivate his friends who were not imprisoned to also master their lives. The most profound letter was the one he wrote to former SS-Oberstgruppenführer und Generaloberst der Waffen-SS Paul Hausser, which was reprinted in the introduction to this book.

For an operation to remove a shell splinter from his left buttock, Jochen Peiper spent the period from 20 October until 2 November 1950 in the Landsberg Municipal Hospital. In December 1950 he was in the Landsberg prison hospital because of thrombosis to the knee, where his wife and the children visited him two days before Christmas. <sup>33</sup> Because of recurring thromboses and phlebitis his right leg had to be constantly bandaged. In the first half of the year he had already been treated in the hospital because of an injury received while playing football.

After Jochen Peiper had been in solitary confinement in the death cell for almost five years, a virtually endless 55 months, General Thomas Hardy, General Clay's successor, commuted Peiper's sentence from death to life imprisonment on 30 January 1951. He explained:

The commander of the Kampfgruppe which committed this crime was Joachim Peiper. His followers regarded him as an extremely strong, inspiring leader who was the active and driving force in his unit. Many of the requests for clemency for him are based exclusively on the idea that such a good officer and soldier could not be guilty of the crime of which he is accused.

I am convinced that Peiper was a remarkable commander and he embodied the driving force of the tank unit which he commanded at the head of the desperate attempt of the Ardennes Offensive. My opinion is that there is no question that Peiper was indeed the main character in the Malmedy case. I am equally convinced that Peiper represents the original motivating spirit for the spreading of terror by his tank spearhead and the practice of killing prisoners of war.

It is precisely those arguments advanced for Peiper's ability as a field commander which must convince any impartial observer that the killing of prisoners of war which took place in so many different locations touched by this unit could never have occurred without his knowledge and, really, without the driving force of his personality behind them. No clear-thinking man acquainted with the facts would give any other participant in the Malmedy massacre a heavier punishment than Peiper<sup>34</sup>

Once the threat of the noose had been removed from Peiper, his optimism began to grow, and he began to train himself professionally. He was allowed to leave his cell, working initially as a gardener and participating in English and French courses conducted in the prison over the next two years. Along with his principal former preoccupation, literature, he also began a correspondence course in economics. It was only then, after he had been released from the death sentence, that Peiper could resume contact with his comrades who had also been sentenced in the Malmedy trial. Previously, he had met some of them in the infirmary. Peiper refused repeated requests by the Americans to write the battle history of the Panzer regiment. 35 Support by food packages made Peiper and other Landsberg prisoners aware of the HIAG (Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit) veterans organization formed in many German towns and cities. It was an association for mutual assistance for the soldiers of the former Waffen-SS. Germans from South America also sent parcels and letters. He wrote to one of the former soldiers of the Leibstandarte living there in the summer of 1951:

When you had to cower behind prison walls in this way for five years, as a pariah under arrogant victors and with a Diaspora going on in the middle of your own people, it was a very odd feeling when a flare shows up on the other side of the ocean. It is like an air drop to a surrounded Kampfgruppe, you know. Here, as there, the important thing isn't the number of calories brought in, but just the amount of moral support, the spiritual ammunition. Even as an isolated individual crouching in a cut off outpost, you no longer feel yourself to be so alone. "We are in contact with the rest of the crowd again," runs from mouth to mouth: "They haven't given up on us yet." Happier, everyone feels new strength flowing from the umbilical cord which we had thought had been cut off. Once again, we feel ourselves part of a greater whole.

And that is why I want to shake your hand. While here in this country we creep about on cat's paws, in part for the sake of high policy, and in part to avoid denunciation, you have given our morale a shot in the arm. We will do what we can by our good behavior to continue to deserve the generally awakening interest. 36

Peiper became a godfather on the occasion of the birth of a son to his former tank driver, Otto Becker. <sup>37</sup> He carried on an intensive correspondence with some of his old comrades. Among these was his blind radio operator, Fritz Kosmehl, to whom he wrote reflectively in the summer of 1951:

There is a considerable number of former friends who are driving carefree around the country in their Mercedes, and who still don't know today, that they "are allowed to write to me" ... For our comrades here, things are going fairly well for some and poorly for others. With the exception of us six major offenders, they all went before a so-called Modifications Board about a month ago, and are now waiting for a change in their sentences. But you can imagine what the result is going to be, when they only needed ten minutes per man for a careful review. When all is said and done, humanity is blind. Justice isn't the only one with a blindfold ...

There is little to say about me. I live as a hermit with my books in friendship and in symbiosis with the bacteria poisoning my blood. But what can you do? Eventually, the healthiest body will not endure rape without consequences. (11 August 1951)

In the spring of 1951 Peiper's 73-year-old father Woldemar looked to the future with confidence:

Even though there are certain circles in the government which more or less support the acts of the enemy during our difficult struggle for existence and, as a result, commit treason, we will continue on with a firm stride into the future, where the citizen will be judged by what he has sacrificed for his country. At that time, the youth of the day will whisper to one another, "That one, he was in the LAH" and remove their caps with respect. 38

Jochen Peiper continued to be afflicted with considerable health problems. On 8 July 1951 Professor Bingold examined him in his clinic in Munich and on 31 August 1951 Peiper was taken to the Augsburg-West Hospital where he was treated for varying phlebitis. During this stay in the hospital Peiper's comrades prepared his escape to Spain, although he knew nothing of it. It was planned for Peiper to be met at the Swiss border by Oak Leaves winner Otto Skorzeny, who was the former commander of SS commando units and famous for freeing Mussolini. During this period Frau Peiper and the children were living in Augsburg at the home of former SS-Untersturmfürer Rolf Reiser, who had been released from Landsberg in 1948. Two days before the planned escape she informed her husband of the plan during a visit to the hospital. Jochen Peiper, who had been a prisoner for more than six years, and who was still sentenced to life imprisonment, didn't have to think about it for very long. His answer was clear: "I won't do it as long as there are any of my men in Landsberg."39

Jochen Peiper's spiritual foundations, character and inner strength are again apparent in his handling of this situation. He made no effort to gain personal advantage. Even after six long years in jail he was still his men's superior and maintained his high moral responsibility to be answerable for them. With this manly behavior, Jochen Peiper epitomized the best in the traditional character of the German-Prussian officer. This tradition had

been held up as an example in Germany for centuries. With the destruction of the German Reich in 1945, and the resulting overturning of all previous values and the repudiation of numerous moral principles by the occupying powers in both west and east, this attitude was deliberately destroyed by force. Semper talis – always the same – was the motto of the First Prussian Grenadier Guards Regiment, which existed until 1918. The commander of the Panzer regiment of the last elite German guards unit, Jochen Peiper, symbolized these inner values during the years of deepest humiliation and so maintained for himself and his fellow sufferers the dignity which the Americans were unable to destroy.

In 1950 his wife Sigurd worked half days at a fruit and canned goods warehouse and, in the fall of 1951, daily up to ten and eleven hours in Tübingen and its surroundings,

... and it is understandable, that I am all too often unable to be home over the weekend because of the distances. From the point of view of time and especially money, it just isn't possible. To maintain such a household with three children and girls takes everything I had, and I am thankful and happy that I can manage. At the moment I am on vacation, and naturally I am enjoying it very much. My children are spending the summer holidays in 'our homeland,' for I am also from Kiel. At first the children spent 14 days in Hamburg with my relatives, and then three weeks at the Schönberger Beach, where in times past we had had a weekend cottage. My brother with his eight children fled there from the Warthe District. He is currently scraping by there ...

The children really enjoyed the sea, especially the girls. Elke and Silke found the flatland and the sea more beautiful, while Hinrich was homesick for his mountains. Now school has started up again, and the children have to work hard.

On Sunday I am going to Augsburg to visit my husband, who is at the West Hospital. Thrombosis is still giving him trouble and in Augsburg they hope that special treatment, which is unavailable in Landsberg, will finally put an end to this thrombosis and make it possible for him to fully recover his health. I am convinced that my husband would be healthy if – perhaps in three years! – he is free again. 40

On 8 November 1951 Peiper returned from Augsburg to Landsberg. He was back again in hospital from 30 January to 7 February 1952, where he had an epididymis tumor removed. In December 1952 an "active tubercular process in the body" was diagnosed, "as a tubercular etiology is considered the most probable in this clinical report." <sup>41</sup> In Landsberg in 1952 Peiper took his examination for official certification as a translator of English. For two years he taught English in the prison school and later was the principal of the school. In addition, he occupied himself with commercial and economic law, as well as accounting. In the summer of 1953 Peiper's wife Sigurd left Lake Tegern with the three children and moved from Rottach-Egern to Sinzheim in Baden-Baden, where she took an apartment on the ground floor of a small house at Bergstraße 32. She had already worked previously in the Tübingen region and had only been able to go home sporadically to be with the children.<sup>42</sup> At this time Sigurd Peiper worked as a secretary for a wood treatment company of Dr. Wohlmann.

There were constant protests against the maintenance of the sentences. Thousands of citizens assembled in Landsberg to protest the injustices practiced by the occupying powers. The press discussed this topic repeatedly and attempted to make contact with

Frau Peiper. For understandable reasons, however, she had little interest in them. A few reports were published, however, and these reports also reveal how the journalists of that period still wrote:

At Sinzheim near Baden-Baden, on the first floor of a small twofamily house, there lives a no longer quite young, but still quite charming, woman with her three children. Elke (16), Hinrich (14), and Silke (12) still have to go to school and must also take care of the housework, because their mama has to work all day as a secretary in an industrial firm. She doesn't make very much, but it is just enough to maintain her four-member family, whose breadwinner has not yet returned from the war. If you want to meet these four people, you have to ring the bell next to the door with the small name plate "Peiper." Probably Hinrich will open it who, at the moment, is the only "man" in the family and feels obligated to protect it. "Mama isn't here. You'll have to come back again after 7:00 PM. Or can I give her a message?" And the young rascal inspects the visitor curiously and steps lightly on the foot of curious Silke standing behind him in the doorway, as he believes that she is too curious.

In the evening Frau Peiper opens the door herself. Friendly but distrustful, she asks the visitor what he wants, and when she hears that he is a reporter, she fends him off: "No, please no. My husband doesn't want us to be smeared in the papers as well. He has had too many bad experiences!" But then hope mounts in her, that publicity in the case of her husband, Colonel Jochen Peiper, will find feedback that could help free him and his comrades from their guiltless imprisonment or at least bring them in front of a real court which could only confirm their innocence. <sup>43</sup>

Hedwig Potthast, who had also once been a secretary for Heinrich Himmler and who had had two children by him, Helge and Nanette-Dorothee, lived next to the house where Peiper's family then lived. She worked in the same firm as Sigurd Peiper and had helped her find employment there. Peiper's son, Hinrich, was in the same class as Helge in the college preparatory high school at Baden-Baden, while Nanette-Dorothee was in the same grade school class as the youngest Peiper daughter, Silke. Hedwig Potthast had become a friend of Frau Peiper's and also wrote to Jochen Peiper, whom she also knew well. It had been agreed that Peiper would tell her children who their father was.

Along with his wife and children, Peiper was visited in Landsberg by his father, his uncle Georg, as well as comrades from his unit, including Dr. Robert Brüstle, his former battalion surgeon in the SPW-Bataillon, and Toni Motzheim, who had been an Unterscharführer in the SPW-Bataillon and who had been condemned to death and released in 1948. Additional visitors were Dr. Eugen Dollmann, the SS-Standartenführer and Italian translator on Himmler's staff, who had been accredited to the German embassy in Italy, the Prince of Schaumburg-Lippe and Hans-Ulrich Rudel, the most successful pilot and winner of the highest German award for bravery, the Golden Oak Leaves with Diamonds and Swords of the Knight's Cross. Rudel came from Argentina and spoke to Peiper on 23 March 1954. Along with his professional studies, books were still Peiper's best advisors within the gloomy walls of Landsberg Fortress. He read enormously, including the ancient classics and philosophical works. Don Ortegas, whom he described as "without a doubt the clearest thinker of modern times." He continued: "Ortegas' polished language and the captivating precision of the classically trained logician would be good company for me during the approaching long winter evenings ... I need glasses for reading and I have become quite gray. But the main thing is that my soldier's heart remains young."44

By 1953 Peiper's attorney had presented no fewer than 11 petitions to the parole board. <sup>45</sup> The unjust sentences from Dachau were not accepted by the institutions of the young Federal Republic of Germany either. On 14 November 1950 the Federal Minister of Justice declared before the German Parliament:

The Federal Republic has the power to not recognize the sentences imposed by the Allied war crimes tribunals. The constitution excludes retroactive laws and the Allied Control Council Law No. 10 is thus incompatible with the recognized legal principle, "nulla poena sine lege." 46

After eight years in prison Peiper wrote to the Interim Joint Parole and Clemency Board on 28 December 1953:

I have discovered that it is senseless for me to dismantle the legal aspects of the Malmedy trial any more, since the case as such is considered closed and that even your commission will no longer bother with those files. I submit myself willingly to this proceedings, but I know that if I am mistaken here and that you will take the comprehensive files into consideration, American fairness and also the recognized principle "Et altera pars auditur" will come into play.

- 2) The crime for which I was thrown in prison and which supposedly took place during the bloody Ardennes Offensive is, as General Hardy himself confirmed, "related to a confused, fluid, desperate combat situation, a final attempt to thwart the allied march to victory, in order to gain a more favorable position for the German Army." Doubtless then, it was not a matter of a thoroughly premeditated slaying on the part of Nazi hordes running amok, but more a matter of a regrettable incident of war which occurred during the heat and noise of battle.
- 3) I was a professional soldier and served my country during a long and detestable war to the best of my knowledge and conscience. My career shows no base behavior and my feelings and thoughts were never controlled by brutal or base motives. Should I ever have offended, it was only in a selfless effort to help Germany at the hour of her greatest need.
- 4) I was in solitary confinement for five and a half years and, for 55 months, I was under the shadow of the gallows. This alone should be punishment enough for an unprovoked incident which, as regrettable as it may yet be, is continuously repeated in the merciless conduct of war today.
- 5) With the exception of short intervals, I have lived separated from my family since 1939. My wife has been burdened by clouds of uncertainty and fear since that time. She has suffered the most, and it is also she who today stands on the brink of physical and emotional collapse. Her life and that of my 75 year-old father are mainly dependant upon my timely return home, as is also the future of our three minor children. It is only for their sake that I ask for clemency.
- 6) Fate has scorched Germany's war generation with its fiery breath and so many young men are held behind prison bars, growing gray before their time. Let that be enough. Wipe out the past and give a chance to those whose hearts long for an opportunity to do their bit for the common good. Decency, good will, and a readiness to forgive can only flourish in a tolerant and prejudice-free climate of open human relations, whereas, as Oscar Wilde said: "In prison, only the good in men withers, the evil however grows and flowers." 47

On 21 May 1954 General Hodge converted Peiper's term of

imprisonment from life to 35 years. 48 After more than nine years in prison, on 28 June 1954, Peiper wrote once again to the Interim Joint Parole and Clemency Board. In the summer of 1954 he was given a medical examination in the Obergünzburg District Hospital after he had previously been treated again in February 1954 in the Augsburg Hospital for his thrombosis in the veins of the leg. In January 1955 he found himself in the US Hospital in Augsburg. On 25 October 1955, after removal of the left epididymis, Peiper was once again diagnosed as suffering from recurring phlebitis which returned at long intervals. According to the results of a meticulous examination, everything pointed to tuberculosis, to which a moderately strong circulatory instability was also present. 49 On the medical side it was also determined that Peiper could not completely regain his health in prison. Besides the confirmed sources of his illnesses through the stress, his body and his mind were in a constant state of defense. The illnesses and the years of vegetating in Landsberg had left their mark on Peiper both internally and outwardly. He wrote that "after ten years of jail, you are only a shadow of what you once were."50

Peiper made his sharpest observations concerning the new spirit of the times which had meanwhile arisen in Germany and which was decreed by the American occupying power:

More than the meaningless trotting in circles on the treadmill of our serfdom, I am disturbed by the moral sell-out in Germany. It is still not certain that we will survive the catastrophe of 1945 as a people. For export indices and social products are no indication of it, but rather a unified national dignity and the moral content of ideas. The will to live does not come about until they are present. However, I despise a present in which one will deny the uncomfortable past for the sake of an imaginary future. <sup>51</sup>

Much of Peiper's thought is revealed in the correspondence which he carried on with some of his comrades. At the same time there is also an undercurrent of the heavy burden of coping with the depressing present. "But for me, in a certain sense, time has stopped. Although those years of idealism and belief are over – that is a certainty – sometimes the dreams and illusions must replace the silence with which we otherwise cannot come to terms with the present." 52

In October of 1955 most of the remaining German prisoners returned to Germany from the prison camps of the Soviet Union. That same month, the first soldiers of the Bundeswehr were sworn in and began their military service within the framework of the alliance with the United States of America. Among them were the former SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck and SS-Unterscharführer Max Rieder, who both had been sentenced to death along with Peiper, and who were taken into the Bundeswehr at their former ranks. However, while young men and veteran soldiers, even those from the Waffen-SS, were putting on the uniform of the Bundeswehr, Jochen Peiper, Georg Preuß, Jupp Diefenthal and Hubert Huber were still waiting for freedom in Landsberg, ten years after the war ended. During this period Peiper worked in the book bindery at Landsberg. He was described by the prison warden as follows: "This man is a perfect gentleman."53

In the meantime, his children, Elke, Hinrich and Silke, were 15, 13 and 11 years old. Jochen had been denied the role of a father for them. "They were starting to stand on their own two feet and getting ready to leave the nest, without my being allowed to get

close to them." <sup>54</sup> In spite of this bitter pill, the hope of coming back to them and to his wife Sigurd was still on the horizon for Peiper. And what had appeared impossible began. After his last request for clemency had been approved, arrangements were made for Peiper's release on parole. On 5 July 1956 his attorney, Dr. Theodor Knapp, submitted his parole plan. A number of companies declared that they were prepared to offer Peiper employment, including the Stuttgart firm of the chemical producer Paul Lechler, who was also President of the Evangelical Church Assembly and Honorary Senator of the University of Tübingen. At this point in time he had already received the Federal Cross of Merit (Bundesverdienstkreuz). He was also offered employment by the German sleeping and restaurant car company of Dr. Hoffmann's in Frankfurt. In addition, Porsche in Stuttgart wanted to employ Peiper, an offer which Peiper accepted.

There were some difficulties because of the fact that Dr. Albert Prinzing, the managing director of Porsche and boyhood friend of Dr. Porsche, was among the three character references produced by Dr. Knapp. The Americans found out that Prinzing had been an SS-Hauptsturmführer in the SD. The personnel chief at Porsche, Alfred de Maight, was Peiper's parole sponsor. The parole request was confirmed after Prinzing was replaced. Peiper's attorney, Dr. Theodor Knapp, was his parole supervisor, and Hellmut Meng was his parole officer.

And then it was done. On the afternoon of 22 December 1956, after eleven years and seven months in prison, Joachim Peiper was the last of those convicted in the Malmedy trial to leave the prison walls of Landsberg.

## Peiper's Life After His Release

His family was given no previous notification of Jochen Peiper's release and it wasn't until two days later, on 24 December 1956, that he was taken to his family at Sinzheim by car. Jochen Peiper could finally spend the Christmas of 1956 with his family. This was the first time since the children had come into the world that their father could spend this holiday with them. For his wife Sigurd and the children Elke, Hinrich and Silke, the eleven-year wait for their husband and father was over. The German and American press reported on Peiper's release, and the American newspapers once again resurrected the old clichés of the trial. <sup>1</sup>

After Christmas and New Years Peiper began his new job with the Porsche Company in January 1957 in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, which initially brought him an income of 477 marks per month. Within the terms of the parole, Porsche was asked to supply information concerning him and, after two weeks, had already reported:

Mr. Peiper has acclimated well, shows enthusiastic interest and has good relations with his colleagues. Mr. Peiper himself, with whom I spoke for some time in the presence of his sponsor, confirms that it is his intention to completely immerse himself in his new work and situation as rapidly as possible. His work interests him. The shop steward confirmed for me that they wanted to help the parolee make the transition to the normal life of a citizen, and treat him without prejudice. However, he described as urgently desirable the public attacks in both the domestic and foreign press to cease as soon as possible, to which I enthusiastically agreed.<sup>2</sup>

Peiper started right at the bottom - in the beginning he even

washed cars – but he advanced rapidly and, when he was given his first raise as a salesman (wage scale 2), he had a gross monthly income of 492 marks. He worked in sales and, after an introductory period, was transferred to the technical sales department as an apprentice in March 1957. Thanks to his drive, ability and personality, he rapidly achieved professional success in this completely new field of endeavor, and became head of the sales promotion department and dealt with the wholesalers.<sup>3</sup> Peiper was able to practically double his income in five months.

During the first few weeks he rented a furnished room from Dr. August Hartmann at Klagenfurt Straße 4 in Stuttgart-Feuerbach, until he got roomier quarters at Waldstraße 32 (later Schmellbachstraße) in Stuttgart-Rohr. The house was located in a peaceful spot at the edge of the woods and had its own garden. Peiper's wife Sigurd and his daughters Elke and Silke immediately moved to be with him in Stuttgart. Hinrich stayed in Baden - Baden to finish school for the year, as the head of a Stuttgart high school didn't want to admit him, and lived during this period with friends of the family at Sinzheim. 4

In September 1957 Peiper was already among those representing the Porsche Company at the International Auto Show in Frankfurt, and from then on was also present at other fairs concerning the auto industry. For this purpose, he had to request permission for the trip each time from the American parole officer at Bad Godesberg. He also had to do this when he visited his father on 2 and 3 March 1957. In addition, he had to submit a report twice a month, later monthly, of his progress in his job. On 26 January 1958 Peiper was released from parole supervision and the Americans informed him that the "unserved portion of his sentence ... [had been] remitted." This was done on the recommendation of the joint board after an appraisal of the request proposed by the federal government on 12 May 1958.

Jochen Peiper's professional success in sales promotions at Porsche of course required that he put in more and more time at work. In the morning he left the house at 6:30 AM to cross the entire city. He returned home in the evenings tired, but he found pleasure and fulfillment in this field, which he described at the beginning of 1960:

It is always interesting and never boring. Unfortunately, family life suffered under this total absorption with work. I only came home to sleep and, moreover, I was always tired. Even so, things went well at home, that is with the exception of my wife's health, who suffered from a chronic liver problem. My oldest daughter now has college prep diploma and would like to study philology. My son is entering his senior year in high school and is far better on skis than in school. The youngest, who is now already 15 years old, is quite the young lady and is adept at wrapping me around her little finger. In short, we should be considered happy. 6

Peiper's father, Woldemar, died on 5 August 1960 in Landsberg at the age of 82 while being transported to the hospital.

On the basis of his impressive professional performance, Ferry Porsche considered naming Peiper as an executive of the firm. This seemed to annoy some of his co-workers, who openly envied Peiper's success. A particularly ugly role was played in this by the legendary racing driver Huschke von Hanstein, who initiated a secret intrigue, acted against Peiper while staying in the background and behaved extremely irresponsibly, although he himself had been a member of the Allgemeine SS. Even so, Peiper was promoted to the position by Porsche. As apparently the Union

Council hadn't been informed, they opposed it vehemently and finally managed to get Peiper dismissed by Porsche on the grounds that he had upset union-management relations, was a careerist, and – they couldn't miss this one – had committed war crimes

Peiper immediately brought action against the Porsche Company at the Labor Court in Stuttgart for breech of contract. The German Trades Union Congress, the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, sneered at Peiper in the 19 May 1961 edition of their paper, "World of Work": "Porsche puts brakes on the Leibstandarte officer. The SS-Standartenführer wanted to rise too far." The court forced Peiper to agree to compensation from Porsche; he received a half years' salary. Peiper's dismissal gave the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund occasion for rejoicing: "Wellbred, well-groomed, a gentleman from head to foot, an extreme Dieter Borsche type, Peiper stood before the judges. He wanted justice; he was fed up with being called a criminal by every 'bum' around," wrote the newspaper published under the management of its editor-in-chief Klaus Besser. It praised the Porsche Company for Peiper's dismissal, but on the other hand found it hard to understand: "It would have been best to keep silent about the Peiper Case, namely for the sake of the customers whose political persuasions have to be taken into consideration."7

As early as June 1959 a newspaper in the German Democratic republic had already slandered Peiper with an article "Mr. Peiper Resides at Porsche." After finishing at Porsche, Jochen Peiper worked as an independent advertising agent. He found a new position with Max Moritz, a major VW wholesaler in Reutlingen as a sales trainer, and was given the position of advertising manager within the framework of sales promotion. During the annual convention of VW salesmen in Wolfsburg, Peiper spent the night in Hanover. During the evening he visited his comrades Siegfried Wandt and Helmut Jahn, who lived there.

Peiper did not participate in the large conventions of those years held by the HIAG. There were far too many demands on his time. After all, he was years behind his comrades in his professional career. On the other hand, he felt little inclination to attend this meeting of thousands of former comrades. Although he didn't belong to the HIAG, nor to the Association of the Order of the Knight's Cross, he still attended the annual meeting of the Association in 1959, where he met Sepp Dietrich among others. But at the Order's formal dinner he didn't wear his Knight's Cross, which could only be worn publicly in the post-war form. He only got back most of his original decorations, which had initially been stolen by the Americans, during the sixties.

Now and then, however, he met comrades from his units, and among those was a meeting at Glemstal on 15 February 1959. In attendance was Kurt Meyer, the legendary commander of the Leibstandarte's reconnaissance battalion, who ended the war as a SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor of the Waffen-SS, commander of the 12. SS-Panzer-Division "Hitlerjugend" and winner of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords. Also present were SS-Oberstgruppenführer und Generaloberst der Waffen-SS Sepp Dietrich and SS-Sturmbannführer Otto Günsche, member of the Leibstandarte and Adolf Hitler's personal adjutant.

After the spokesman for the HIAG, Kurt Meyer, died on his 51st birthday of an unexpected heart attack on 23 December 1961, Peiper was present at his burial at Hagen along with 4000 comrades from the former 1. and 12. SS-Panzer-Divisionen.

Jochen Peiper was also among the 8000 mourners at the funeral service for Sepp Dietrich in April 1966. There, for the first time since 1945, he met his old comrade Paul Guhl again. In June of that same year Peiper was invited to the convening convention in Stuttgart for the founding of a veterans organization for the soldiers of the former I. SS-Panzer-Korps, but he did not participate and did not attend any of the group's later meetings. The main reason for this was still lack of time, because of overwork, not because he didn't want to. He answered the invitations and used the opportunity to express his solidarity with his old unit.

Several times, Peiper visited former SS-Oberstgruppenführer Paul Hausser at Ludwigsburg, and he also met him in the Stuttgart home of SS-Sturmbannführer Johannes Göhler. In addition, Peiper and Göhler met SS-Standartenführer Walter Harzer on many occasions. He also maintained contact with SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor of the Waffen-SS Gustav Lombard, who had been Peiper's section leader in the 7. SS-Reiter-Standarte as a SS-Hauptscharführer.<sup>10</sup> On the occasion of the national day of mourning in 1967, Jochen Peiper along with several hundred participants found himself at the ceremonies arranged by the Veterans Organization for the I. SS-Panzer-Korps and the Baden-Württemberg chapter of HIAG. These ceremonies included a visit to the grave of Sepp Dietrich and a final memorial in the Ludwigsburg Ratskeller restaurant. It was attended by Paul Hausser, Albert Frey and several comrades who had become members of the Bundeswehr. Peiper was also present on 21 December 1972 at the burial service of SS-Oberstgruppenführer und Generaloberst der Waffen-SS Paul Hausser, who died at the age of 92.11

Even if he didn't attend the large meetings, he still maintained close written correspondence with some of his comrades, which included his blind tank radio operator Fritz Kosmehl, whose mastery of the problems of life was of great interest to Peiper. Kosmehl visited Peiper in the summer of 1960, when he was still working without problems at Porsche.

This first meeting after 15 years took place in a very relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. We met the entire family. As my wife snapped a couple of photos, we sat chatting on the balcony of his home and he joked with us. In one of the pictures, you can see a laughing Jochen Peiper, which was somewhat of a rarity. He also did this earlier on an occasional basis, but he never liked "chummy" situations. Despite that, he was still very relaxed amongst us. Perhaps this was also because he had not yet had all those dismal experiences with the union. It is possible that he still believed that he would be able to make a normal life for himself, but that wasn't within his power. <sup>12</sup>

There were many former officers of the Waffen-SS working at VW – as was generally the case in the automotive industry – whose close ties with one another rapidly contributed to the economic success of the operation. Peiper rapidly integrated himself into his surroundings at VW and did well at his new job. He also got along very well in his personal relations with Max Moritz, the VW wholesaler in Reutlingen. Jochen Peiper seemed to have finally established himself in his profession and freed himself from the burdens of the past, leading an unencumbered life and being there for his family. However, the black shadow of the persecution against him and his unit fell back over him again after two years. In 1963, visiting workers from Italy, incited by the union, began to persecute Peiper and call him the "murderer of

Boves" in Italy. The next two years passed peacefully, and the incident seemed to be closed. However, on 10 March 1965, at the request of the prosecutor's office, the Stuttgart District Court began a legal investigation of accusations raised against Jochen Peiper arising from the fighting in Boves on 19 September 1943 in which 23 civilians lost their lives.

The course of that fighting has been described in detail in the corresponding chapter of this book describing the Leibstandarte's presence in Italy. Along with Jochen Peiper, the former commander of the 14. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2, SS-Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, was also cited. When the former commander of the 13. (gep.) Kompanie, SS-Untersturmführer Erhard Gührs, learned of the investigations from the newspapers, he reported to the prosecutor's office in Stuttgart as a witness for the defense, with the result that he was accused as well. 13 The prosecutor's investigations, which dragged out for more than three and a half years and involved several interrogations of Peiper, Dinse, Gührs and 127 other members of the SPW-Bataillon, and the possibility of a trial, which threatened to last for years, destroyed Peiper's laboriously constructed economic existence and hurt him deeply. One of his early comrades arranged for flight to Spain, where new identities had already been prepared for the three, but this was unacceptable to Peiper. He would face the charges. 14

After all the investigations – which called 14 Italian witnesses as well as 130 German ones – there was not one shred of evidence produced by the summer of 1968 for any act by Peiper or his two company commanders in violation of the rules of war or applicable international conventions. As co-plaintiffs, nine Italians were represented by Dr. Robert Kempner and R. J. Levy of Frankfurt. When Kempner suspected that Peiper's innocence would be proven, he requested an extension of the preliminary investigation on 19 September 1968 with additional testimony from Italian partisans, but the court denied this. The First Major Criminal Division of the Stuttgart District Court (I. große Strafkammer) decided on 23 December 1968 to exempt the three accused from prosecution and not to open proceedings against them. <sup>15</sup>

During this period, Peiper was constantly slandered with increasingly obscure accusations and, in the end, he was even stamped as an agent for the "final solution of the Jewish question" in northern Italy. However, even though no evidence whatsoever could be produced to support this deceptive claim raised by the Jews, the claims were marvelously suited for an attack on Peiper's reputation. He was deeply hurt by the investigations in which he was accused of illegal behavior and by the parallel movement to slander and attack him by third parties. He found himself more and more with his back to the wall with his and his family's existence under threat. Bitterly he wrote:

Kempner is in league with his fellow ideological companion, Simon Wiesenthal (whom the Austrian Federal Chancellor Kreisky, in spite of having the same faith, recently attested used "Mafia methods"). They called a press conference and, for a change of pace, made a "second Eichmann" out of me and called me the executioner for the "final solution of the Jewish question" in northern Italy. The result: Stopping the proceedings after four years of preliminary hearing and the destruction of my livelihood.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly before Christmas 1968, Jochen Peiper was officially absolved of all accusations. Inwardly, however, he was deeply depressed that they would no longer leave him in peace.



Peiper's youngest daughter Silke.



Sigurd Peiper with Silke, Elke and Hinrich in 1950.



The Gsotthaberhof at Rottach-Egern, where Mrs. Peiper lived with the children from 1943 to 1953.



Peiper's children at Sinzheim in 1953.



Jochen Peiper after ten years in prison on 29 June 1955.



Former SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck, who was sentenced to death at the Malmedy trial and released in 1948. He was the commander of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and became a lieutenant colonel in the Bundeswehr. In this picture he wears his wartime decorations, among them the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the 4th level of the Panzerkampfabzeichen for 75 days of armored combat.



Former SS-Unterscharführer Toni Motzheim of the 12. (s. gep.) /SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was among the first of those sentenced to be released without judicial explanation in April, 1948



Peiper at a national meeting of the Ordensgemeinschaft der Ritterkreuzträger (Association of Knight's Cross Winners) in Regensburg in 1959. In conversation with the former SS-Sturmbannführer Ernst August Krag (left) and another Knight's Cross winner.



In 1959 Jochen Peiper met with Kurt Meyer ("Panzermeyer") (left), Otto Günsche (rear) and Sepp Dietrich (right).





Kurt Meyer, Peiper and Sepp Dietrich.

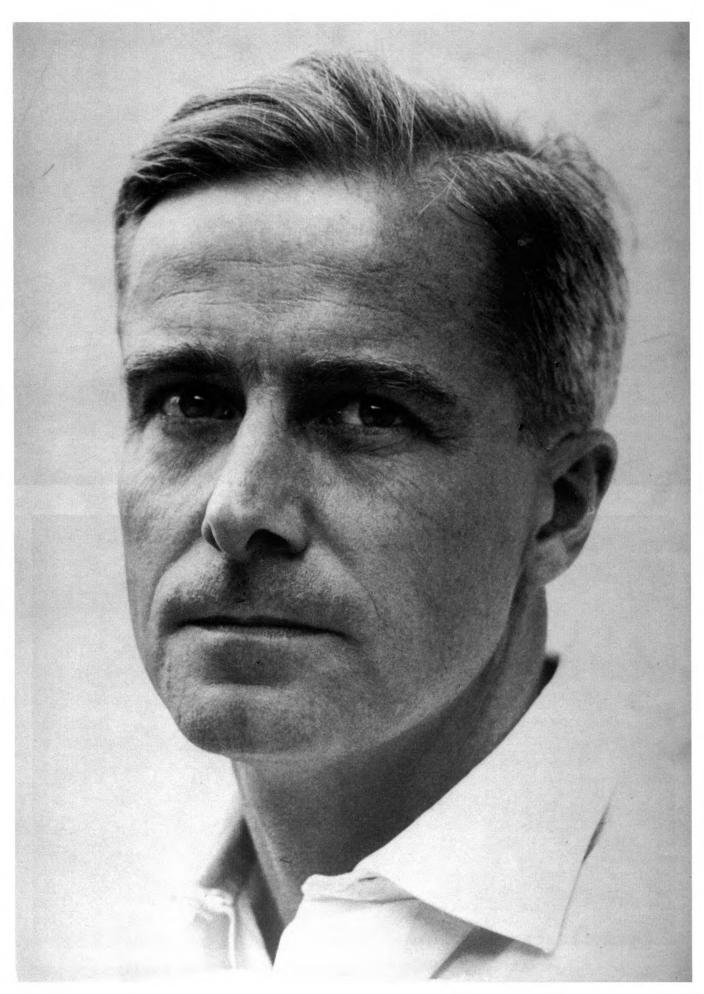


July 1960 in Stuttgart: Jochen Peiper, his wife Sigurd and daughter Elke.





Jochen Peiper, his son Hinrich and wife Sigurd.



## In France

Prevailed upon by Peiper's friend, Uli Wieselmann, the editorin-chief of the publication "Auto, Motor, und Sport," in 1969, Peiper went to Motor-Presse-Verlag (Motor Press Publishers). Its publisher, the former race driver, Paul Pietsch, put him to work with the mercurial Wieselmann. Both men deepened their friendship and complemented one another ideally.

Since the legal investigation and the unspeakable attacks in the newspapers, and after other reports against his person, Peiper was considering a fundamental change. The children had all graduated from school and were engaged in their university studies, and had already left home. As a result, he and his wife could look outside Germany for the peace that was no longer ensured him by the country for which he had given so much. During a vacation in France in 1962 Peiper, together with his business partner Max Moritz, visited his friend, former SS War Reporter Hans Schwarz van Berk, in the latter's house in St. Tropez.

Peiper found out there how he could acquire real estate in France and was introduced to a French acquaintance of Moritz', Albert Gauthier from Chancey. This man showed Peiper a piece of woods belonging to him near the little village of Traves near Vesoul in eastern France. Peiper was immediately taken by the beautiful little area and rapidly came to an agreement with the owner. For 20,000 Francs he acquired a piece of woods one hectare in size near the Saône, which was called le Ranfort. After approval of the plan, he had a modest house constructed there by a mason. He supervised the construction on weekends.

During the summer of 1964 he spent several weeks with his son Hinrich at Traves in a Bundeswehr tent, when they spent a lot of time working on the woods and house. In the fall Otto Dinse, Erhard Gührs, Dr. Robert Brüstle and Walter Kern, all former officers in the SPW-Bataillon, went to Traves to help their former commander. The house was finally finished in 1965. In the following period, Peiper and his wife went to France on many weekends. During those years Traves was something like a weekend house for Peiper, but also much more than that as well. It was a peaceful place where he could completely relax. In the next few years he expanded the house and strengthened the roof framing with fir wood, and in this he was given valuable help by a journeyman cabinet maker from Traves. Peiper purchased an additional piece of land adjoining his place.<sup>2</sup>

On 30 January 1971 Peiper spent his birthday at Traves and his son Hinrich was also there.

My son asked to go for a walk in the woods on our own. We roamed about for the entire day, exchanging observations concerning birds, trees and the weather, then cooked supper in the twilight. Later we sat quietly by the fire with our pipes going and carefully explored our two worlds. With respect to what was going on around us — domestic and foreign politics, economics, public morality, and the increasing problem of air pollution and solid waste — I checked off every year of my life with satisfaction and tried to pull back to interior lines without animosity. To do this, you have to leave a lot behind which was formerly dear and precious to you ... If I had been alone, I would have emigrated — inwardly I had done it a long time ago. But I could only wait for the next war criminal trial with stoicism and fatalism which, for a change of pace, our friends from the east

were busy concocting.3

After the house was finished Peiper invited some of his comrades to visit him. In the spring of 1971 Otto Dinse, Eduard Gührs, Dr. Robert Brüstle and Walter Kern returned to Traves.<sup>4</sup> During their two-week stay in the small clearing in the middle of the woods, they had to cut down some trees standing too close to the house and did some other tasks. During these days, Peiper created a cozy atmosphere at Traves for his four former officers and they felt that their old commander was a happy man. In long evening conversations, while they prepared their meals themselves, they had an opportunity to discuss all manner of subjects, and Peiper talked about topics of personal importance to him and his family. <sup>5</sup> Later Peiper built a wood shed opposite the house for firewood storage and as a guest house.

In 1972 Uli Wieselmann, Peiper's friend and colleague, died. Consequently Peiper was dismissed by Motor-Presse-Verlag. Peiper had to bear the high costs of living in the large city of Stuttgart such as house rent and car costs and was no longer willing to start a new career from the beginning. Surprisingly, he came to a very different decision. He and his wife Sigurd moved permanently from Stuttgart to Traves. Depressed, embittered, and deeply disappointed, this highly gifted man turned his back on his Germany, for which he had done so much, to find peace in France. The country which for almost ten years had considered him one of its elite had turned away from him. Peiper was justified in regarding himself, to express it in his own words, "as a persecuted person of the 3rd Reich, for which there was no longer any place in Germany." 6 He deliberately took the path "to intellectual and, ultimately, real emigration" as he himself bluntly expressed it.7

At first, his wife Sigurd was shocked by the idea of exchanging the large city of Stuttgart for an isolated forest cottage in a foreign land. Finally, financial arguments along with other points convinced her to agree to a change. For many people Peiper's decision to go to France was and remains a puzzle. However, in addition to the economic factors, he had precisely calculated the logical consequences of the constant persecution aimed at him and the repeated confrontations with untrue accusations. Peiper himself wrote: "Perhaps I need only add a final comment here – that I was not expressing black pessimism. It was more a matter of my unmistakable experiences since 1945, and the fact that since then I had never been left in peace. To a certain extent, I have been programmed into the restitution computer."

Right from the beginning his presence in France was entirely legal and, on 27 April 1972, he received his residence permission. There, in undisturbed nature in the seclusion of the forest, in his house and in the considerably deeper lying Saône flowing past on his wooded property, at the side of his wife, Jochen Peiper gradually recovered the inner and exterior peace, which was denied him in Germany.

Traves is an old village with 368 inhabitants lying in the Department Haute-Saône. The closet larger city is Vesoul. The countryside around Traves is lightly rolling and scattered with fertile fields and forests. Outside of the village there is a border of forest along the Saône, which included Peiper's land, some 400 meters behind the village. If someone wanted to visit Peiper he had to know exactly the position of the not very deep but wide stretch of woods. It could only be reached by crossing a

gently sloping field with the woods beginning at its far end. Then he would rapidly run into the house which was somewhat deeper in the woods. Neither the house nor any entrance to it could be seen from the narrow road. There was merely a mailbox on the side of the road next on the fence around the field. A narrow, inconspicuous lane was passable by car, so that Peiper could drive up to his house.

Some 200 meters from Peiper's house, close to the narrow road, was the large old Velet mill, which had been purchased by the German Erwin Ketelhut and expensively restored. Ketelhut had been a member of the 11. Kompanie of the Leibstandarte in 1940/41 as an SS-Untersturmführer. However, when Peiper took command of this company in October 1941, Ketelhut was already in the reconnaissance battalion. Later he was in the "Hohenstaufen" Division and, finally, the "Reichsführer SS" Division, where he was a SS-Hauptsturmführer and battalion commander in the artillery regiment. Peiper knew Ketelhut from Stuttgart, where both had met in the "Königshof" restaurant, where former soldiers of the Waffen-SS, including Sepp Dietrich, used to enjoy getting together. After Peiper was established at Traves, he had mentioned the water mill to Ketelhut, which Ketelhut then acquired. Both men saw each other often, but their personalities were too different form them ever to have become friends. Moreover, Frau Peiper didn't particularly like Ketelhut. An initial cooperative venture for the raising of trout failed for this reason. Ketelhut didn't put the required energy into this business, which he didn't regard as necessary because of his secure financial situation as a former building contractor.

Peiper purchased food such as butter, milk and bread at Traves while he went to Vesoul for major purchases. In the evenings, he almost never went to the village inn at Traves, which Ketelhut frequented, and where some of his wood cuts hang there. Ketelhut maintained extensive contacts there. The owner of the bistro was Ernest Rigoulot, the mayor of the village. In any case, the two Germans living past the end of the village were known to the inhabitants.

Jochen Peiper's life had by then completely changed. Although he worked part-time doing special projects for the management of the Deutsche Automobil Treuhand Gmbh, he mainly worked as a free-lance translator for the Stuttgart firm, Motorbuch Verlag, and translated some military historical works from the era of Frederick the Great and Napoleon from English to German. 9 He had long since perfected his English, as can be seen in his correspondence with people in the United States. Those who knew English found that he spoke with a New England accent. Along with his activity as a translator, Peiper worked a lot in his woods, clearing and moving trees and planting new ones. He had always loved the forest. He enjoyed nature and allowed the philosopher and the intellectual within him free rein. Jochen Peiper was happy in his small kingdom at Traves; he called it his paradise. There he had realized his dream from those long years in prison, a house with a garden, surrounded by trees. 10

To a certain extent, Peiper was undoubtedly a francophile, a leaning which he acquired during his stays in the country in 1940 and 1942. <sup>11</sup> If you were to climb down the steep, wooded slope to the not inconsiderable river Saône flowing past his house, you would find his row boat. For more than a year and half, Peiper's letters revealed a deep inner contentment, which

he had discovered for the first time for a long time.

Much water has flowed down the Saône since the bushes in front of my last retreat closed behind me ... Now that the children are all taken care of and married, the baggage has become lighter. Now I only have to worry about my wife, dog, and whatever is nearest to hand. For me there is little point in thinking about tomorrow. I hope that no donkey comes up and eats away our cover, that we stay healthy, and that I may be granted peace and quiet after all the other worrisome years, without persecution, slander or constant discrimination. And if not, than just that time which we have spent here and which no one can take away from us will have to be enough. In brief, my wife and I live entirely in the present, with our friends the trees and plants, music and books, and comfortable conversation before a glowing fire ...

Otherwise I spent a part of every day at the typewriter, as I am still working for my publisher, take a look in Germany once or twice to see if my last two business partners are not yet broke and then live in the expectation of the next pension check. <sup>12</sup>

Certainly no one could find words to better express the happiness which Peiper found at Traves, as he himself sketched in a description of his everyday life:

For the last couple of weeks a half-tame crow has brought some life to the cabin, and we very much hope that it will understand that it has it a lot better with us here at the house than in the spotlessly clean stewpots of Traves. I spend my time at the typewriter and outside, that is after I have earned the second by means of the first. There are hundreds of trees to cut, to give others a better chance at life; branches to prune, planting and transplanting, and above all the elimination of "toutes les petites cochonneries" – in German: the weedy underbrush – which is, as is well known, fitter than all the cultivated plants.

So far the winter has been quite mild but still surprisingly long. If you ask the locals, each one will tell you something different. For us it is clear that the climate is scarcely different from that which we were previously used to. And that's good, because of the transplanting of old trees. Otherwise, my conversion from a big city boy to the simple life has been very easy. You become altogether tougher, live more with the elements, and act once more according to what you pick up through smell and the feeling in old wounds rather than the weather report. My occasional trips to the depths of humanity have already taken on the appearance of a nightmare for me. I don't feel well in lines of traffic and in hotel beds, and only breathe more freely when the bushes of my own property close together behind me. In brief, I am becoming old and eccentric and I'm digging myself in deeper. But that doesn't exclude my continuing pleasure in a very few people, whether through a lively correspondence or during a visit. 13

His contact with his comrades diminished at Traves. His friend, Schwarz van Berk, a well-known war reporter for the Waffen-SS, died at the beginning of 1973. His former adjutant in the SPW-Bataillon, Otto Dinse, and his wife visited Peiper often at Traves. So did his former orderly officer, Dr. Arndt Fischer, who became a dentist after his release from Landsberg and who also treated Peiper. In addition, the Leibstandarte's operations officer, Rudi Lehmann, also went to Traves, as did Dr. Robert Brüstle, the SPW-Bataillon's surgeon. In 1973 Peiper visited the last divisional commander of the

Leibstandarte, Otto Kumm, at Offenburg. He never attended meetings of veterans organizations for his former units. <sup>14</sup> When in 1973 he read about a meeting of the survivors of his old SPW-Bataillon in the publication for former soldiers of the Waffen-SS, "Der Freiwillige" ("The Volunteer"), he spontaneously wrote to the author:

When your announcement; "Achtung, Blow Torch Battalion," came to my attention by accident, my heart, I won't lie, beat noticeably faster for a moment. I have always considered the III. gp. (gepeinigte – tormented) with its formation, its victories, and the particular élan which was its alone, as the high point of my military career and felt closer ties to it than to any other unit. The fact that developments after the war initially forced me into prison, then to inward alienation, and finally to emigration doesn't change things one bit. Please tell that to the comrades, when they get together on 19/20 May, and convey my greetings and very best wishes to the meeting of the Blow Torch Squadron. They may be certain that my thoughts are always with them. 15

At this meeting of the unit, the ties between Jochen Peiper and the men were still very clearly evident. They were ties which had been given to very few commanders, enabling them to win the hearts of their men and to be always sure of their respect.<sup>16</sup> Along with Otto Dinse and Dr. Arndt Fischer, Peiper's tank radio operator, the blinded Fritz Kosmehl, counted among the regular visitors to Traves:

On return from a vacation in Spain, we turned off from the regular route with our 1972 trailer at Besançon and headed for Vesoul. We then arrived at the small village on the Saône after a short drive. At the post office, we asked for directions to his house, which was located directly on the steep bank of the river. As always, we were given a warm welcome, especially by his wife Sigurd, who hoped that our presence would provide some relief for her husband's occasional depressed moods. We also had our 15-year-old daughter Petra with us, who helped brighten things considerably. On that same evening we were invited to a large dinner by the mayor, and former Hauptsturmführer Ketelhut, who owned land neighboring Peiper's and to whom we were introduced, was also present.

The Peiper's house had become a very comfortable home, radiating considerable warmth, which was proof of Sigurd Peiper's domesticity and competence. We had endlessly long conversations, which concerned current events as well as images of the past. 17

During a visit by Otto Dinse, the mayor of Traves, Ernest Rigoulot, invited Peiper, Dinse and Ketelhut to a friendly supper. In the spring of 1973 Peiper got himself a young German Shorthaired Setter, to whom be gave the name Timm and with whom he spent much time in the woods. <sup>18</sup> Timm soon had a son, which answered to the name of Tamm. Peiper was his own master. Mostly he divided his day so that he worked during the mornings on translations. At noon, if he was alone in the house, he ate a meal his wife had previously prepared or he went to eat at Mayor Rigoulot's. In the afternoon he worked in the woods or cut wood for the winter. In the evenings he enjoyed listening to classical music, with Bach his favorite, or he selected a book from his abundant collection of literature.

His house, which had a ground plan of 22 by 6 meters, was comfortably set up. You reached the living room, outfitted with

a large fireplace, through a glass-roofed veranda at ground level. The Peipers had brought all their furniture, including some antiques, with them from the house in Stuttgart and it gave a cozy look to the house at Traves. In addition to the kitchen on the ground floor, there was a bathroom at the other end of the house. On the second floor there was a wood-paneled study and library set up next to the bedroom. At the end opposite the entrance there was a balcony, from which you could see the Saône through the thick trees, while on the other side it was hard to see the field between the road and the edge of the woods. <sup>19</sup>

In the winter of 1974 Peiper wrote: "Even during this season here in the woods, it is homey and extraordinarily cozy under a warm roof. If it weren't for the swollen waters of the Saône gurgling past and the occasional barking of the dogs, you could imagine yourself to be on a far-away star." While Jochen Peiper undoubtedly enjoyed life at Traves, in the long run his wife found the extreme isolation to be too monotonous. The children only visited their parents at Traves occasionally. Jochen Peiper wrote: "Weeks would go by, without seeing another person. Even the telephone spares us. I must confess that it is always an event, especially for my wife, when one of the children talks for ages on the phone." So Sigurd often went to visit the children, for instance to her daughter Elke in Munich. She also visited her sister in Stuttgart or other relatives, and Peiper stayed home alone at Traves.

At the moment, Timm and I have been watching the house for two weeks, while my wife is with the children in Munich. A good feeling to know that our successors are happy and comfortably making their own way. You can leave them to it and take care of your own affairs. Once more I am coming back to reading, music and to the observation of nature. My translation activities fit in harmoniously to the rest. Right now I am busy with a book which gives a very dramatic and stirring account of the sinking of the "Gustloff" in the last days of the war.<sup>22</sup>

In November 1974 his wife was visiting her daughter Silke in Hamburg and Peiper wrote with his characteristic ironic undertone: "... we three dogs live here alone in the woods and indulge in our natural inclination to run wild ... Otherwise, it is deathly quiet, like on a far-away star ... This summer we were overwhelmed with visitors, who really only wished to satisfy their curiosity and see how the old goblin lives. Misunderstanding, envy and pity counterbalance each other." <sup>23</sup>

Peiper withdrew more and more to this star, as he often called Traves, "the more I sink into my self-chosen isolation and become a fixed part of the woods." <sup>24</sup> Some visitors saw a change in his personality there. How much the consciousness of having no place in Germany and possessing no rights played a role in his isolation there along with the deep wounds inflicted by ten years in prison at Landsberg, can only be surmised. Moreover, his wife Sigurd was no longer healthy. These and other factors contributed to the reasons for the change in Peiper. When Fritz Kosmehl, who along with Dr. Arndt Fischer, Otto Dinse and Bettina Wieselmann, appeared almost every summer at Traves, visited him once again, Peiper was in Germany on an appointment.

So that evening we had a long visit with Frau Peiper, in which my wife and I did everything we could to cheer her up and to relieve her somewhat depressed mood. During our conversation, she suddenly said: "If only my husband could laugh the way you do, just once!" When we went back to our trailer, there was a knock on the door, and Ketelhut asked if he could still join us. We sat up for half the night and talked. He wanted to know if we could move Peiper to stop the recent crowd of visitors; there was a certain uneasiness in the village ...

Peiper didn't arrive until the following evening and was much quieter than usual. There was scarcely the trace of a smile on his closed face. Even so, the hours passed as always in complete harmony, but he did avoid questions of personal importance ...<sup>25</sup>

Peiper followed current developments in the daily and international political situation and thought about them. "Even if we had won, we couldn't have created more chaos" ran one of his sarcastic remarks in that regard during the winter of 1974. 26 Peiper's life at Traves became increasingly withdrawn, and he or his wife only went to Vesoul for essential purchases. However, Peiper wasn't living in the past, and his view of his life as a soldier was realistic and never idealized.

While in Germany and during his years of isolation at Traves, Peiper carried on a correspondence with numerous people both within and outside the country, including American authors, who mostly asked him about his memories of the Ardennes Offensive. Peiper made an "effort to make it clear to seeming friends as well as to declared enemies, who we were, what we wanted, and what we did. The result was always only a slanted report, a justification tailored to a specific purpose and, in many cases, willful deceit." <sup>27</sup>

At the end of 1975 Peiper surprised his comrades with the following announcement:

... after keeping silent for 30 years I will throw down the gauntlet in the form of a book. I have no ambitions in this regard ... and Speer's material success in no way inspired me to do this. However, I have followed for many years the ways in which foreigners have continued to spread additional slanders among us which have gradually achieved the status of "sources," which even German authors and publications cite for a lack of German documentation. I feel myself duty bound to our old bunch to finally open my mouth now ... What I intend to do in this documentation is not a minute description of the Ardennes Offensive, let alone any heroizing of our part, but the path taken by Kampfgruppe P. from Malmedy to Landsberg. I will speak my mind, but I will write nothing which can't be proven. 28

What was behind Peiper's sudden decision to publish what he had suffered and experienced? First of all, it was inspired by the continued slander of the entire organization in the distorted and false presentations of the actions of the Waffen-SS, and especially those of the Leibstandarte in the Ardennes Offensive, where Peiper played the role of the arch villain. Peiper saw correctly that from a factual point of view, just the existence of a few American works concerning the Ardennes Offensive containing descriptions of the massacre would constitute new sources which, although untrue, would later be accepted uncritically and quoted since they were readily available and, as a result, would pass into the common established version of history. At that time Jochen Peiper had already recognized the sorry rules of the game in historical writing, as they appear today in even clearer form:

History is always written by the victor and the histories of the

losing parties belong to the shrinking circle of those who were there. They already give the next generation merely an excuse for an uncomprehending shake of the head. Even so, I have always been of the opinion that one should promote contemporary documentation – perhaps then a later evaluation of events will come to a different conclusion.<sup>29</sup>

Especially on the American side, numerous authors of military history were guilty of repeating totally unsubstantiated claims. Peiper expressed himself concerning the well-known book by the American John Toland, *The Battle of the Bulge*:

Somehow you have to be able to read these American simplifications not quite without sympathy. This entire war literature is a direct descendant of the western, only that we play the part of the Indians who, at the end, in spite of their impressively superior numbers, are conquered by the unflinching GI's, who carry the sign of the crusaders on their chests. <sup>30</sup>

In 1959 Peiper had informed Toland of the following after he had studied a part of the manuscript for this Ardennes book:

After reading your entire piece of writing, I regret to say you are not writing history. Instead you prefer to cling to the old and primitive clichés of the Nazi beast, who slaughtered civilians and who violated the laws of war and peace. Admittedly, it is a very effective weapon in psychological warfare and it is still a sure way to sell a book or film. However, such a one-sided and prejudiced story should be beneath the dignity of any man with intelligence and understanding. And above all, in what way is it good?

Aren't you aware that I myself could write an analysis showing how the US revenge trials violated the Geneva Convention as well as all other law, showing their "third-degree" interrogation methods and the fabrication of "evidence and confessions?" Or produce a report of how the US Army pulled back during the Battle of the Bulge without any necessity for doing so, and what a poor show 3 US divisions put up when they were unable to destroy a tiny German Kampfgruppe without fuel or ammunition, allowing them to blow up all their material and march through their sleeping enemy, unshaken and unbroken.

But what good would it do? Is it not more important for us to forget the old quarrels and extend our hands to each other, to leave the past in peace, instead of scratching at the scabs of partially healed wounds. I am deeply convinced that heroes and villains were equally distributed among both sides. I take off my hat to every soldier of the last war who was ready to make the supreme sacrifice.

I would be grateful if you would leave the path of today's professional agitator and instead remember the common thread. Moreover, the role of the US Army in the Battle of the Bulge can only be more highly regarded when it gives its enemy the credit due, instead of describing the conventional monster for people at the comic book level and with the crude self-righteousness of the crusader. To prove that I think better of you than you do of us, I agree to your request and attach a photo of myself from that period. Please send it back. It belongs to my wife, and all the others were liberated by your countrymen.<sup>31</sup>

Jochen Peiper was still as conscious of his responsibility for the men of his Panzergruppe then as during the war years, in Schwäbisch Hall or in Landsberg. Thirty years after the end of the war he no longer wanted to see them insulted, dishonored and described as criminals in books by American and German authors. Jochen Peiper had physically separated himself from them and their reunions, but never in thought or spirit. He still felt that he was a link in the chain of the unit. In the book he had conceived, "From Malmedy to Landsberg," Peiper was considering "... in the first place the historical dedication and presentation of a memorial for my old comrades, who even today are lumbered with unanswered accusations of a 'typical' war crime by the victors, a crime which never occurred." <sup>32</sup>

Peiper already had comprehensive materials available to him and began to request reports from a number of his comrades concerning their actions in the Ardennes and their subsequent experiences. He received a great deal of highly interesting material concerning the trial from his chief American defense attorney, Colonel Everett, who had been a friend of his until his death on 4 April 1960. <sup>33</sup> His son sent additional important letters to Peiper at Traves. Dr. Ernst Klink of the Military Historical Research Office at Freiburg visited him there. <sup>34</sup> Aside from short contributions to the multi-volume history of the Leibstandarte, which his friend Rudi Lehmann wrote, Peiper had not yet considered any activity as an author.

Once again he involved himself in intensive correspondence with authors and comrades and answered questions for foreign historians. In April 1976 Peiper informed the American professor James Weingartner of the following (Weingartner had already written a book on the Ardennes Offensive and was then working on what he assumed to be the constant political influence on the Waffen-SS during the period before the war):

Ideological orientation is a fairy tale. I was in the LAH for three years during the period of peace before the war as a platoon leader and battalion adjutant, and I never experienced anything of the kind. Sepp Dietrich hadn't the remotest inclination in that direction and the soldiers refused to have anything to do with any kind of philosophical instruction, much to Himmler's constant irritation. That was already the case at the cadet schools! 35

In the summer of 1976 in the midst of Peiper's carefully prepared book project, for which he had already begun the research, the persecution of the past, which he had long believed to be over, broke over him again with unexpected suddenness. On 21 June 1976 the Communist newspaper in Paris "L'Humanité" brought out a major, full page article with the headline: "Who Is Protecting the War Criminals?" A subtitle in the persecution article by Pierre Durand ran: "A Member of Himmler's Staff in the Haute Saône." Along with a description of Peiper's life history as produced by the pen of a Communist, in which the alleged was crimes in Italy and Belgium, as well as his time with Himmler, were highly exaggerated, three photos of Peiper were also printed showing Peiper, the meadow in front of his property and his mailbox by the side of the road. In addition, it printed a document from the official archives of the German Democratic Republic in East Berlin, which verified Peiper's membership on Himmler's staff. Durand went on to write: "This criminal, guiltier than any criminal ever guillotined in France, guiltier than any criminal currently in prison, has been pardoned and set free." 36

That excerpt was characteristic of the tone in which the entire article was written. That was the beginning of a carefully prepared and well coordinated man hunt for Jochen Peiper. On the following day posters were distributed at Traves which initiated the crude opening measures of his persecution: "Inhabitants of Traves: An SS War Criminal, Jochen Peiper is among you ..."<sup>37</sup>

The preparations for this act had been under way for some time. They began more than two years previously on 11 June 1974 when Jochen Peiper was ordering wire-mesh fencing for his kennel at a hardware store at Vesoul, 18 kilometers from Traves. The salesman, Paul Cacheux, a militant member of the French Communist Party, noticed that Peiper spoke French with a German accent. When he asked for the delivery address, he learned his name and address. Supposedly, Cacheux had just previously read the passage pertaining to Peiper in the East German Brown Book, which he had been given during a meeting with German workers from Zwickau in the former East Germany. As a result, he immediately knew who the German was who stood in front of him in the store. That was his version, however, as published in the Communist media. Actually, Cacheux only looked for Peiper's name in the Brown Book after Peiper had been in the shop. There he found the relevant information. There was hardly an officer or general of the Bundeswehr who was not described as a war criminal in the East German Brown Book. 38

Two days after the article appeared in L'Humanité, major reports also appeared in East German newspapers which revealed that

the Nazi war criminal, Joachim Peiper, former SS-Obersturmbannführer, was living unmolested in the French department of Haute Saône. He had been tracked down by French resistance fighters ... Peiper at present lived in the village of Traves on his property called "the Fortress" ... Although he avoided publicity, the war criminal had been discovered ... Italian resistance fighters discovered that Peiper was the head of the HIAG in Baden-Württemberg, the organization for former SS-members ... The 'Humanité' has asked the French officials to take measures. The former resistance fighters demanded that this criminal no longer poison French air. <sup>39</sup>

Without going any further into the contents of this article, it should be pointed out that Peiper's property was called le Ranfort, and not Renfort as reported in the French papers, which did not mean "fortress" and he wasn't a member of the HIAG. 40 The salesman Paul Cacheux discussed his "discovery" with his friends in the communist party and found out from political friends at Traves that Peiper lived outside the village, had two dogs, got a lot of mail, even from the USA, and that close to his property you could often hear the noise of a typewriter. The supposed discovery of a war criminal gave Cacheux no peace. After a while he wrote a detailed report to the influential communist newspaper in Paris "L'Humanité" and informed it of the discovery which he had made.

The paper saw a gift from the gods in Peiper's presence in France. It presented an opportunity to intervene in French politics which were undergoing change and reawaken the old firmly held resentments against the Germans. For this purpose a 61-year-old former SS-officer was the perfect excuse, especially since he had been convicted of war crimes and was one of their most famous officers. The paper assigned its specialist on the war and the resistance, Pierre Durand, to work on the Peiper case

Durand carried out his research in Stuttgart, in the East German official archives in East Berlin, in Milan and in Boves. At that point he had enough material and wrote the full-page article. The newspaper had made prior arrangements with the Communist party at Vesoul to begin action against Peiper simultaneously with the appearance of the article. This took the form of the handouts at Traves, printed by Cacheux and his friends, and by "Peiper SS" being smeared in white paint across a road at Traves that night. 41 The paint was removed by a French farmer, one of Peiper's neighbors, the next day.

That same morning Peiper received a visit from ranking officials of the French gendarmery from Vesoul, who determined who he really was in a three hour interview for the Prefect. He described his actions during the war and after in detail, as well as the background for his resettlement in France. 42 During this conversation, which took place in a friendly atmosphere, the police expressed their opinion to Peiper that his persecution was an attempt by Moscow to use the French Communists to initiate an attack against the German-French rapprochement and the new joint NATO defense strategy. Once again, Jochen Peiper, after eight years of peace, stood in a crossfire of persecution and this time in a foreign country where many of the older inhabitants continued to regard Germans as their hereditary enemies. He took the threat very seriously. But what is really surprising is the fact that Peiper seemed to know that his end was near. Just one day after the article appeared, he wrote a letter to his wife which was clearly written as a testament.

My Sigi,

As the souls of the dead of the past are once more in pursuit of me, and everything indicates that I will take the great voyage ahead of you – it is well known that there is no remedy against the idiocy of the inflamed masses – I want to thank you once more for everything. You were a splendid lifelong companion and friend, and I am only sorry that I couldn't provide you with a more untroubled life.

My last thoughts are for your security and safety. The first will be taken care of by the insurance and the pension and, hopefully, you will find the second in the greater Munich area. I think that it would be wrong to sell Traves and consider leasing it better. The children can be responsible for the small maintenance costs and look after things occasionally. In good days, this unspoiled piece of nature can be a link to nature itself and in bad days, a refuge – in spite of all the present persecution! I would also be very happy if you would later not only leave the inheritance of Traves to our three children, but also to Bettina Wieselmann. She has understood me better than our offspring and is more taken with Traves than they are. And then my dogs – they had only a few years, but they were good ones and I wish them a good start in the eternal hunting grounds, where I hope to find them.

My burial, cremation, or whatever, I wish to have carried out without announcements, family participation or the participation of comrades and where it will cost the least.

I embrace you – spend a couple more carefree and healthy years in beautiful Bavaria and please remember only the good times in our marriage together.

(signed) Jo

The author initially had strong doubts concerning the authenticity of this letter which was found by the French police in the

garden of Peiper's house and, until recently, kept in their possession. However, Jochen Peiper's son confirmed to the author that during the summer of 1976, his father was already psychologically exhausted and didn't want to start all over again after the beginning of the new attacks against him. He was preparing himself for the inescapable. Peiper considered the threat in a foreign country as very serious, and this new persecution was a deadly blow to his desire to live. He had already had so much taken from him in his life, that he refused to allow himself to be driven from Traves, but yet he no longer wished to fight on. Only someone who can empathize with Peiper's thoughts can really understand the upsetting contents of this letter. Jochen Peiper had simply become tired of the struggle with the constant persecution and slander. That in his farewell letter there is only a dash instead of his dogs' names, shows how hard this was for him, and his signing "Jo" for Jochen corresponds to what his wife normally called him. Bettina Wieselmann was the daughter of his dead friend Uli Wieselmann and also a journalist. She had often visited Traves and was something like a sister to Peiper's children. 43

After the sensational article in "L'Humanité" French newspapers carried a great deal concerning Peiper. For this purpose their reporters traveled to Traves in the following days to speak with Peiper himself. He too declared himself willing to talk with them as he had nothing to hide. On 30 June 1976 Peiper wrote:

Immediately afterwards and during the following days, constant visits by reporters, radio, and television. Central topic of conversation: You are the murderer of Malmedy, but in any case you have already paid for that; however, you are also responsible for the "Italian Oradour" and are Eichmann No. 2'. Atmosphere and commentary in this regard are as if they had finally sniffed out my hiding place after a long hunt. 44

His peace and that of the village was destroyed. A former resistance fighter declared at Traves: "During a time when we talk about environmental pollution, we can not allow this guy to pollute the air of Haute Saône, the clean air of France, any longer." 45 The mayor of Traves, the owner of its bistro and its local retailer, Ernest Rigoulot, said to the press: "Peiper is known. If we wanted him to leave, then we'd tell him so ourselves. We don't have to take orders from anyone." 46 For Jochen Peiper and his resolute wife Sigurd, the "expulsion from paradise" began, as he bitterly called it. 47 They refused to leave him alone, and from then on he was continuously under observation. "A few days ago, a photojournalist had taken up a position on the opposite bank of the Saône with a telephoto lens. From there, he was constantly sneaking from cover to cover like an Indian, watching all my movements." 48 At the same time, the Communist party goaded members of the resistance and other resistance groups to protest in front of the prefecture at Vesoul against Peiper's presence and demand his immediate expulsion.49

The pressure on Peiper increased constantly and took on an increasingly menacing aspect, "The next step in this organized campaign consisted of death threats by telephone, that my house would be burned and my dogs poisoned. Finally, ultimatums to leave the country immediately." <sup>50</sup> The French gendarmery took the massive threats against Peiper seriously and sent out daily police patrols which passed by his house and made sure that everything was all right. <sup>51</sup> Peiper described the situation at the

end of June:

Threatening letters arrive. "Red commandos" warn of abduction to Italy. Choruses and telephone calls warn of burning down the house and shadowy figures approach the house in the dark, which had to be placed under stronger police protection. My dogs – in the meantime turned into wolves by the press – are an intimidating factor, as is the fact that I make my rounds constantly with field glasses and a hunting rifle. In other words: A peaceful paradise has been turned into a besieged fortress overnight. 52

Peiper informed one of the representatives of the press: "I will remain at Traves and will not leave the region. I have been happy here for four years, and that is not a small thing." <sup>53</sup> In another interview, he expressed himself: "When I settled here, I believed that France was a democratic country which respected the individual." He once again confirmed his desire to remain there: "Go away from here? I have lived four happy years here. Four happy years in one life, that's a lot." <sup>54</sup> To the constant accusations raised against him, he responded: "Ten years in prison. I paid for it." <sup>55</sup>

At the beginning of July 1976 the situation seemed to have calmed down somewhat. The Prefect of the Department of Haute-Saône, de Pelagaey, was under constant pressure by letter and telephone to expel Peiper. As Peiper's residency permit expired on 25 February 1977, it was clear to him that the prefect would not renew it because that would have been the simplest solution to the problem for the French. "Both the mayor and the prefect considered me a burden and recommended that I spend a few months in Germany until everything had a chance to calm down here. At the same time, it was also clear to me that the house would be burned down behind my back and that no one would be able to prevent it." 56

In the meantime the communists tightened their net around Peiper. The mailman who lived in the Traves post office, 28-year-old Emil Michel, provided access to the telephone numbers. Shortly after the appearance of the article in "L'Humanité", he told a reporter that "it will soon be ringing at Peiper's." The communists tapped Peiper's telephone number (74 10 67) and interpreted his conversation with the publisher over his work on a book by Duffy (an instructor at the British Military Academy) on the Army of Frederick the Great as "military information." She Letters to and from Peiper were opened or disappeared, as the police later admitted. Peiper then turned to the German Ambassador in Paris, Sigismund von Braun. On 9 July 1976 he informed Dr. Arndt Fischer in Munich:

However the situation develops now – whether rapidly and violently or gradually and relatively peacefully – my wife and I have to expect that we will have to move again. We have perhaps a good half year to prepare for it. If possible, we would prefer Bavaria, as long as it is within reach of public transportation from Munich. We would be looking for a small house, if possible in the country. Under the circumstances existing here, I would prefer not to try to sell Traves, but I would be prepared to lease it ... I would love to be able to discuss this personally, but for the reasons stated above, it is regrettably not possible. I have to hold the position, in the literal meaning of the word ... your old and now very tired Jochen Peiper. 60

On 12 July 1976 he wrote to Rudi Lehmann,

The fact that the burning sun shines peacefully here on the just

and unjust alike certainly justifies me in coming to the conclusion – in spite of the occasional sound of thunder – that now more than ever I have to write the book on the way from Malmedy to Landsberg. It doesn't matter where we end up, I will certainly find a place to set up the typewriter and I also won't lack the words to unmask the people who set the nooses around our necks in 1946 and who today with the paid help of Wiesenthal and Kempner are capitalizing on their revenge. In spite of this, I intend to deposit the files with Dr. Klink, as I received a threat just a short while ago from the "Red Brigade" to burn me out. I hope the rabble shows up. I have packed and also loaded my rifle. 61

On the morning of the following day, 13 July 1976, Peiper met his neighbor Erwin Ketelhut at his mailbox. Once again, he had received a death threat in the mail. His wife Sigurd had left that morning for a trip to visit a friend in Basel which had been arranged since the first of the month. She had only taken an overnight bag with her and had certainly not been sent away by her husband as was later repeatedly claimed in the press. 62 Ketelhut invited him to spend the night at his house after this renewed threat, but Peiper declined. 63 Ketelhut described him: "He was absolutely relaxed and calm." Peiper told him in a determined manner: "I will not allow myself to be frightened. Although they may shoot me, I will not be beaten into a cripple. If they come, I will defend my house." He told him. 64 Ketelhut gave Peiper an American Remington Shotgun from 1940.

The day passed and Peiper spent the evening and the night in his study on the second floor. During the evening he talked on the telephone to a friend in Breisgau. Toward midnight he heard his dogs suddenly begin to bark and, shortly after, shots were fired. Peiper went out onto the second floor balcony and strained in the darkness to see what was going on at the dog house to the left in front of the house. He had his shotgun in his hand. Shortly after that he was fired on. Several men were near the house. Peiper fired warning shots into the crowns of the trees, six meters above the ground, since he didn't want to hurt or kill anyone. After he had fired a few shots from the Remington, he fetched his .38 Colt. He was fired on again and Peiper returned fire with 5 shots from the Colt. The perpetrators, however, hadn't accomplished their mission; they didn't merely want to frighten Peiper, they wanted more.

Towards 1:00 AM on 14 July 1976, they threw three fire bombs through the windows into the house. The Molotov cocktails shattered and the fire rapidly found fuel in the simply built fir-wood study. The fire broke out almost simultaneously at three places in the house. After the flames had taken, the perpetrators took flight. Jochen Peiper began to gather important papers and documents from the study to take them out of the house and into the garden in order to save them from the fire. To do this he had to run downstairs from the study and through the ground floor, as the glass-roofed veranda was located beneath the study window, so that he couldn't throw the documents out of the window into the garden. He made numerous trips out of the house and into the garden in this manner. While he was back in the study, the burning roof of the house collapsed on him and Peiper perished in a sea of flame. The house burned completely down to the ground.

The police from Scey-sur-Saône were the first to arrive on the scene at 4:30 AM, followed by those from Vesoul. The Traves

Fire Department was delayed in their attempts to extinguish the fire by problems with a hydrant. While cleaning up, the police came across the completely carbonized corpse, deformed unrecognizably. The distorted corpse had a hole in the chest. Peiper's watch, a Heuer, had stopped at 1:10 AM and, except for the crystal, had come through the fire intact.. Under the body was found a Colt .38 Special. The rifle was found close to the body, but only the metallic parts had withstood the flames. Ketelhut's Remington shotgun lay undamaged on the balcony and three shots had been fired from it.

In the garden the police secured the documents rescued by Peiper, including insurance papers, and some of his wife's clothes. The dogs were missing and four 6.35 mm bullets were found in the dog house. Peiper's neighbor, Ketelhut, had taken sleeping pills during the night and for that reason hadn't heard the shots. At 5:00 AM he arrived at the smoldering ruins, awakened by the noises. In the afternoon Clerget, an investigating judge, arrived at the scene of the crime. 65

Hinrich Peiper, who had heard of the inconceivable crime on the radio, took the train to be with his mother and arrived at the scene of the crime with his mother on 15 July in the car of a friend. Following that Frau Peiper had to identify the body of her husband at Vesoul. "I absolutely cannot say whether that was my husband. It is impossible to identify what they showed me. It was horrible ... " she stated afterwards to a reporter. 66 Three renowned Parisian forensic doctors, Professors Campana, Ceccaldi and Michon, began the autopsy of the burned corpse at Vesoul on 16 July 1976. They were assisted by the toxicologists Drs. Lebreton and Garat. Their investigations were extraordinarily difficult as the corpse was completely carbonized by lying in the fire for hours. It had not shrunken to the impossible size of 60 cm, however, as was falsely claimed in the press. The doctors declared on the following day that the corpse showed no sign of a projectile, meaning that Peiper had not been killed by gunshot wounds. The hole in the chest and the broken shoulder came from the burning beams of the collapsing roof. The arms and legs had shriveled to small stumps in the blaze and made any identification impossible. There were no exterior means of identification for Jochen Peiper.

The photos seen by the author have been excluded from publication out of basic decency and for reasons of consideration for the family. German dentists in Stuttgart and Munich were asked by the French judicial authorities for details of Peiper's dental records. X-rays of Peiper's jaw and his medical records were obtained from Dr. Arndt Fischer. Fischer made repeated requests to go to Vesoul, as he was sure that he could make a positive identification. The French authorities did not accept his offer. <sup>67</sup> The police examined the evidence and tried to establish suspects. Hospitals within a 200 km circle were checked for people with gunshot wounds, as it was possible that Peiper had hit one or more of his assailants.

On 15 July 1976 two arson experts arrived from Lyons and Marseilles and discovered traces of three incendiary devices in the ruins of the house. The police had already found a fourth one, intact, in front of the house. Soon two men from Traves and a communist from a neighboring village were interrogated.

But there was insufficient evidence to hold them as the assailants. And they were also unable to prove that four youths had been involved in the murder. There was no testimony con-

cerning observations made during the night of the murder, which really doesn't seem unusual given the location of Peiper's house. It was absolutely invisible from the road. Only the shots had been heard by a few of the inhabitants in the village. The investigation was conducted by Inspector Roger Lavaux from Dijon who, because of the spectacular nature of the crime, was under considerable pressure from French officials to clear it up in a hurry. Moreover, the press was ceaselessly running about in all directions and making all kinds of suppositions.

Peiper's dogs were found on 15 July 1976. One was wounded by a bullet from a 6.35 mm pistol. Eight completely masked men from an organization calling itself "les vengeurs" ("the avengers"), had a unique meeting with the press in Paris on 18 April 1975, when they declared that some war criminals would soon find themselves in front of God's court. The organization claimed responsibility for Peiper's death in a letter to the Paris newspaper, "L'Aurore." Nothing else is known about them.68 The foreign and domestic press featured stories concerning Peiper's death, and he soon became a KGB or CIA agent.<sup>69</sup> The more important German newspapers and weekly publications sent correspondents to Traves to investigate. As the weeks went by, the heavily detailed reports revealed factual fairness towards Peiper on the part of some newspapers and weeklies and they unanimously condemned the murder. 70 For example, on 16 July 1976, "Die Welt" wrote:

He survived the second world war as a tank officer, and he even survived a sentence of death by an American war trial, but he was unable to survive the 'humanity' of the French Communist newspaper, 'L'Humanité'. Jochen Peiper, the former colonel of the Waffen-SS, was murdered on Wednesday in his chosen country of France. The terrorists, who liquidated him in a commando operation and reduced his home along with his body to ashes, have not yet been caught, but scarcely anyone doubts that they came from the strongly communist-influenced circles of the former French resistance. <sup>71</sup>

"Der Spiegel" on the other hand ran something spiteful entitled: "A Tough Break for Him" 72 to which his son Hinrich responded in a letter to the editor:

He really didn't have a tough break. Rather it's a postwar tragedy and a fate which this man didn't deserve. At the end he found the death which he had to suffer as the personification of the collective guilt of others for coming to grips with the past. He had to die because the communists raked up existing resentments and demanded a general hunt for Fascists supported by fables of cruelty from the war.<sup>73</sup>

The Communists washed their hands in innocence and the party secretary for the Department of Haute-Saône, André Vuillien, stated: "It was our intention with the Peiper affair, among other items, to draw public attention to Giscard's dangerous pro-German policy." He obviously wished to avoid any connection between him or his party and Peiper's murder. "Everyone knows that the events of the night of 13/14 July had nothing to do with the policies of the Communist Party, which had unhesitatingly condemned any assault, in so far as there was an assault." But the persecution on the part of his friends in the party continued after the death of Peiper. Ducros, the priest of Traves, told a French television reporter: "I condemn Peiper's murder and blame the communist persecution propaganda exclusively." On 23 July 1976 he informed the correspondent of

the newspaper "Die Welt" that this interview was never broadcast and that previously he had been threatened with death by strangers, if he dared to say a mass for Peiper. The priest: "I pray for him and for his murderer, but the peace of our village has been destroyed." <sup>75</sup>

Traves' mayor only said coldly: "I expected something like that, unless he left the village before it did. They had already threatened to blow up his house, if he didn't leave ... The people won't cry about it." <sup>76</sup> But the feelings at Traves concerning Peiper's murder were not unanimous, as newspaper, radio and television reporters discovered. A former French soldier told a reporter: "War is war. Do you think that what we did in Algeria was pretty? The destroyed villages, the torture of Algerian resistance fighters?" <sup>77</sup>

The communist press in France and the East German newspapers came up with a new variant. Peiper hadn't died in the flames of his house, but had only faked his death and was moving along the underground network of the SS, along with "other 'dead' Germans" in South America. 78 Alsatian newspapers came up with the adventurous story that Peiper had shot one of his attackers, dragged him into the house, set fire to it, and escaped his assassins. 79

Otto Dinse also arrived at Traves after the deed and met with a CIC official there who also seemed to be investigating the case. In the meantime, Inspector Lavaux had made no progress in his investigations. The version of French police was that the crime was not professional and presumably committed by so-called hangers-on, who apparently hadn't intended to kill Peiper. After an evaluation of the facts of the case, this version appears to be on very thin ice. To support their interpretation, French police stated that their investigations revealed the intact Molotov cocktail which had been discovered didn't contain the normal fuel mixture, but rather a high percentage of Diesel fuel. Moreover the three other incendiary devices in the wood-paneled study would have been enough to set fire to the wood and quickly spread. The fact that this fourth device hadn't been hurled into the house meant nothing, for when a house was already blazing like a bonfire from the three devices which had been thrown, no additional device was necessary. Moreover, by this time, at the latest, the perpetrators had thought about taking flight.

The fact that Peiper's telephone line hadn't been cut is no support for their supposed lack of professionalism. Anyone who knows the local situation knows that Peiper's house was completely invisible. Who could Peiper have called for help over the telephone? Even if he had been able to alert the police at Vesoul, 18 kilometers away, there would have been plenty of time before their arrival for the perpetrators to have thrown their incendiary devices into the house.

In summary, we may say the following: That when several perpetrators invade personal property at night armed with at least one pistol and four incendiary devices, there can be no possibility that this was merely an act intended to frighten Peiper out of the country. This would play down the event into something harmless. Their intentions were different. They shot at one of the dogs and wounded him. Then they shot at Peiper when he appeared on the balcony. The police forensic team found traces from Peiper's return fire some six meters up in a tree. They found a bullet from the .38 Colt between a Scots pine and the dog house some ten meters in front of the house. They found no

bullets in the walls of the house which were still standing, but which may have lodged in the burned out wooden part of the upper floor. Then, immediately afterwards, the perpetrators threw three incendiary devices through the windows at three different places in the house, so that the fire could spread rapidly. They had planned their act with precision, equipped themselves accordingly and so, at the very least, having thrown three Molotov cocktails into the house, were deliberately prepared to put Peiper's life in deadly danger.

Even if none of the perpetrators could be identified, we are at least sure of one thing: the instigators of the arson were the communists in Paris and at Vesoul. Their inflammatory articles, especially in the Parisian newspaper "L'Humanité" were an invitation to the militant section of the communists to hunt Jochen Peiper. They invited the use of private force and were written accordingly. They had accomplices in East Berlin where the East German news agency ADN openly called for force in its article "Peiper, the Murderer, Tracked Down." It prophesied that he "would get what he deserved." 80

The identification of Joachim Peiper's body emerged subsequently as the major problem for French officials. Their behavior towards the Peiper family, which was at no time kept informed, is truly astonishing. A half year after the death of his father, Jochen Peiper's son Hinrich stated in a open letter:

Even now, the family is unable to properly inter the mortal remains of Jochen Peiper, something which in our culture is a minimum prerequisite for bringing such a tragedy to an end. At no time has the family been informed of the results of the autopsy or given answers to the questions of when, where, and how this man died or of any progress in the identification proceedings. Occasioned by the suppositions of dubious journalists, the question of the body's identity has become a mystery, which has attracted clichés, prejudice, and fantasies. Serious objections must be raised concerning the safeguarding of the corpse as well as concerning the manner and duration of the scientific investigations during all of the subsequent examinations which had as their basis the spurious necessity of identifying the carbonized body with conclusive certainty.<sup>81</sup>

The Peiper family was only informed by a journalist of the release of a French press release on 7 March 1977, in which the French officially reported the conclusions of the identification proceedings. According to the release, they determined that the dead man was a male corpse more than fifty years of age, and that an x-ray of one tooth corresponded to one remaining tooth. In addition, they pointed out an arthritic change in Peiper's spine. Peiper's family was not officially informed by the French. 82 The German government made efforts though its Embassy in Paris and its Consul General in Lyons to clear up the case and was in direct contact with the French Foreign Ministry in this affair. 83 However, the French police were unable to clear up the crime and make any concrete identifications of suspects.

Two years passed and in the summer of 1979, new inquiries were instituted under the direction of Christian Nannini, a judge for inquiries, at Vesoul. Along with Ketelhut, some other people were interrogated. However, these activities produced no new evidence. 84 The instigator of the manhunt against Peiper, salesman Paul Cacheux, found himself under pressure after Peiper's death. In the fall of 1979, a bomb exploded in front of the shop

where he worked. 85 A second one was ignited in front of his house, but he was uninjured both times. A detailed film about the Peiper case was broadcast on French television, and German TV stations also broadcast long reports. 86

Jochen Peiper's wife Sigurd was shocked by the crime and regretted that she hadn't been there on 14 July 1976. After the crime, she at first lived with her daughter Elke in Munich, and then afterwards established a home in Miesbach where the family still had good friends. <sup>87</sup> All investigations for the purpose of making an absolute identification of Peiper's body were unsuccessful. The way in which the investigations were carried out was later criticized by the Germans. <sup>88</sup> The French judiciary officials never gave any reason why the identification proceedings dragged out so long and, despite that, came to no concrete conclusion at the end. Not until 30 March 1977 did French officials inform Mrs. Peiper by telephone that her husband's body would arrive in Munich two days later.

Because of the inexact identification, the officials were unable to issue a death certificate. This had important consequences, for this meant that a nameless corpse was released for burial, and the Peiper family had no legal recourse in France, as any such action would be impossible without the presentation of a death certificate. A damage replacement suit for the loss of all of the Peiper couple's possessions was also legally impossible for the children to place without a death certificate, and its lack could conceivably allow French officialdom to even doubt the crime itself. Moreover, this set no limit to the numerous speculations proliferating in the French press concerning Peiper's supposed survival.

The Peiper family was completely in agreement on future proceedings in this situation. They knew that with the acceptance of the corpse the case would be officially closed in France. However, if the family were to refuse to accept the corpse without a death certificate in the name of Jochen Peiper, the remains would receive burial, as required by law, in an unmarked grave in France. The family, especially Jochen Peiper's son Hinrich, who was a lawyer, consulted a number of attorneys and government institutions in the short period available to it. As a result it decided to prevail upon the Munich District Attorney's Office that it confiscate the remains on their arrival and carry out an identification investigation by German officials and, if necessary, invoke the German-French legal assistance agreement.

On the following day, 1 April, 1977, after a four-hour wait, Jochen Peiper's corpse arrived at the Munich Forest Cemetery in a hearse with Parisian license plates at 6:00 PM. The hearse had been ordered to take a precise route through Switzerland and Austria. After the Peiper family had paid 2250 francs in cash, it was given the closed casket, which the French Minister of Justice had paid for, which contained a plaque with Joachim Peiper's name and the dates of his birth and death. The family also received the following papers: A "Record Concerning the Transport of the Body of Mr. Peiper, Joachim" in which, among other things, it was stated that the parts removed for the autopsy had been replaced in the casket; a body transport certificate which certified that, "Mr. Peiper Joachim did not die as the result of any infectious disease"; "Prefecture Order ID/2/I/77 No. 845 for 28 March 1977, which permitted the body of Mr. Jochen Peiper to be removed from the territory of the country"; a burial permit issued by the judge of inquiry, Clerget, for the "carbonized corpse found in the burned ruins of the house of Peiper, Joachim at Traves in the night of 13/14 July 1976;" and, a remarkable death certificate, which the mayor of Traves had prepared on 17 March 1976, and which ran as follows: "On 14 July 1976 at Traves at the place called le Ranfort, a person of male sex died, whose identity could not be determined and whose personal description follows: None."

The Munich District Attorney's Office was aware of the public interest in the case and on 4 April 1977 confiscated the casket and had it brought to the Forensic Institute of the City of Munich, where the corpse was examined on the following day by the renowned forensic physician Professor Dr. Wolfgang Spann. In addition, Dr. Arndt Fischer, Peiper's former dentist, was present at this post-mortem examination. To everyone's surprise, when the casket was opened, the corpse's head and other important parts of the body needed for identification were missing, so that any initial attempt at an identification was blocked right from the beginning. Several police officials were present at the attempted post-mortem.

It was only on 27 September 1978, after tedious negotiations and invocations of the legal assistance agreement, that French officials handed over to the Forensic Institute of the City of Munich the head and other missing parts of the corpse which were in Paris. 89 Inexplicably, only a molar remained from all the teeth which, moreover, had been sawed through. It could not be used to determine identification by either Professor Spann or by Dr. Fischer. This is new proof of the irresponsible handling of evidence by the French police who originally had possessed both of Peiper's jaws. 89 The District Attorney's Office did not release Peiper's body for burial until 19 February 1979. During this period Sigurd Peiper died at the Munich Hospital at Sanatoriumplatz 2, on 10 April 1979, from a recurrence of breast cancer. So, as a result, a joint memorial service was held for Jochen Peiper and his wife Sigurd at the Benediction Hall at the Munich Forest Cemetery. Only the closest family members were invited as Jochen Peiper had wished. His son Hinrich read the eulogy. 90 Finally, the Peiper couple was cremated and placed in the family plot nearby, where Peiper's parents had already found their last resting place.

The author has to respect Peiper's express wish: "When I must cease living, I wish to be buried as quietly as possible. Under no circumstances do I wish my grave to become an object of cults or pilgrimage." The author also assumes this respect from his readers, and so will not identify the burial spot. 91 For only there, three years after his death, did Jochen Peiper find that peace which he sought for so long, and which was no longer granted to him after 1945.

#### An Evaluation

With the death of Joachim Peiper on 14 July 1976, a man was persecuted and killed whose life could have represented his entire generation of German youth. Jochen Peiper was an intelligent, extremely talented man, who in his youth, along with tens of thousands of his generation, voluntarily became a soldier for the rebuilding of the new German Reich. After the economic and moral collapse of the Weimar years, one could see new development in Germany under Hitler's leadership with enormous improvement in every area. The young, confident nation struck off the chains shackled to the German people by the

Versailles Treaty. However, the former enemy powers begrudged Germany its economic and military recovery as well as its peaceful reunification with Austria and the Sudetenland. They used Poland as an excuse for a new war against Germany.

Jochen Peiper was a soldier and fought in 1940 and 1941 in both France and the Soviet Union as a company commander in the Leibstandarte, one of the elite units of the Waffen-SS and the Wehrmacht. In 1942 he took over command of the SPW-Bataillon and commanded it in the east in 1943 with great success until he was entrusted with the Panzer regiment at the end of 1943. For his personal bravery and for the victories he won, Peiper was decorated with the German Cross in Gold, the Knight's Cross, the Oak Leaves, and the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross. In the summer of 1944 he commanded his regiment in battle on the Normandy invasion front, in the winter of 1944 in the Ardennes, in 1945 in Hungary and finally in Austria.

Peiper's life of suffering began after the surrender, and it clung to him after spending 10 years in Landsberg prison under a death sentence. After his release he was persecuted and his attempts to then settle down to a peaceful civilian life were blocked by this persecution several times. Constantly confronted with old accusations of war crimes supposedly committed by units under his command, he could find no peace in Germany any more, although the courts had declared him innocent. Embittered and disappointed, he turned his back on Germany and found happiness in France. But even there, he came within the sights of those locked in the past. After a major campaign of persecution waged against him by the French Communist Party, the inconceivable occurred.

In the early hours of 14 July 1976 Jochen Peiper was killed in his house in France by arson. He personally suffered the deadly consequences of the moral condemnation and continuous slander of the entire Waffen-SS. The assault on Peiper struck one of the most outstanding officers of the Waffen-SS. However, symbolically, it was a blow which hit the entire organization, which had and has to constantly endure old, unsubstantiated accusations delivered as polemics. "We called out to Germany and heard no response," Jochen Peiper wrote in his Landsberg cell. And it was the same in 1976. No one raised a hand to help him, just like today, when no government institution protects the 15 million soldiers of the Wehrmacht who are persistently slandered and at the same time called murderers with impunity.

The murder was inconceivable to the Peiper family after it became known. The family members of this man received no public sympathy in Germany from either official or political organs, and none was to be expected from the morally spineless Bundeswehr. He left behind his wife Sigurd and the children Elke, Hinrich and Silke. Hinrich Peiper wrote:

Even if my parents' wishes to grow old together on their bit of land on the banks of the Saône and to die together as Philemon and Baucis, where they would finally transform into trees, were unfulfilled, they had still planted and carefully tended so many of these trees at Traves that they will remain as living proof of their impact and witnesses to their life here on earth. Our parents have won a bit of immortality through us and their grand children, even if only by way of Mendel and his theory of heredity.<sup>2</sup>

To this day, Hinrich Peiper cares for the piece of land in the forest of Traves, according to his father's bequest, and where the ruins of the house stand as a monument to the blinding hatred which was directed at his father. Jochen Peiper is also deeply anchored in the hearts of his soldiers, and most especially those of the SPW-Bataillon and the Panzer regiment. What's more, Jochen Peiper has an assured place in the long row of the greatest German soldiers of all time. His life as a soldier and as an unbending prisoner of the enemy powers is exemplary and can serve as an example. Peiper later wrote without reference to himself: "Every nation of people needs someone to emulate, even when it has been cast on the rubbish heap of history." 3 Jochen Peiper can be considered, without question, representative of the best in German soldiers and as a servant to his people. Moreover, even during the war, he adopted the idea of one Europe, which had already been given initial form in the Waffen-SS.

As Jochen Peiper can no longer write his book, the author has tried to allow him to speak as often as possible by way of quotations. He would also like to end this work with Jochen Peiper's words:

Where would the torn-apart west be today, without each of those dikes of German bodies that were so important to history and that can no longer be ignored? The line of occidental combat outposts runs in a wide circle from the Caucasus to Finland. Representatives of our entire culture keep watch silently. And although their grave mounds are leveled and many nations are still ashamed of their noblest sons, it is still only thanks to this avant-garde of the idea of a single Europe that Genghis Khan's heirs didn't ride their tanks all the way to the Atlantic.

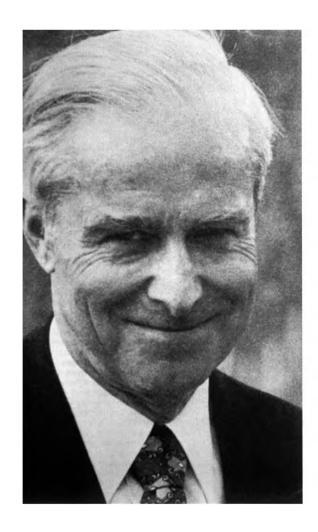
In the war our proud divisions were considered rock solid. We have become a legend for our resolution to the prison guards of every country. Hopefully our children will be able to say the same of us, that in misfortune we too were not unequal to our fate, that we ourselves in the Diaspora provided the leaven for reconciliation and the European idea.



1964: Traves in France, on the banks of the Saône, where Peiper built his house. Peiper (left), his former adjutant Otto Dinse next to him and Erhard Gührs.



Peiper and Dinse working in the woods (1964).





Peiper in his woods of le Ranfort at Traves.



A happy Peiper at Traves.

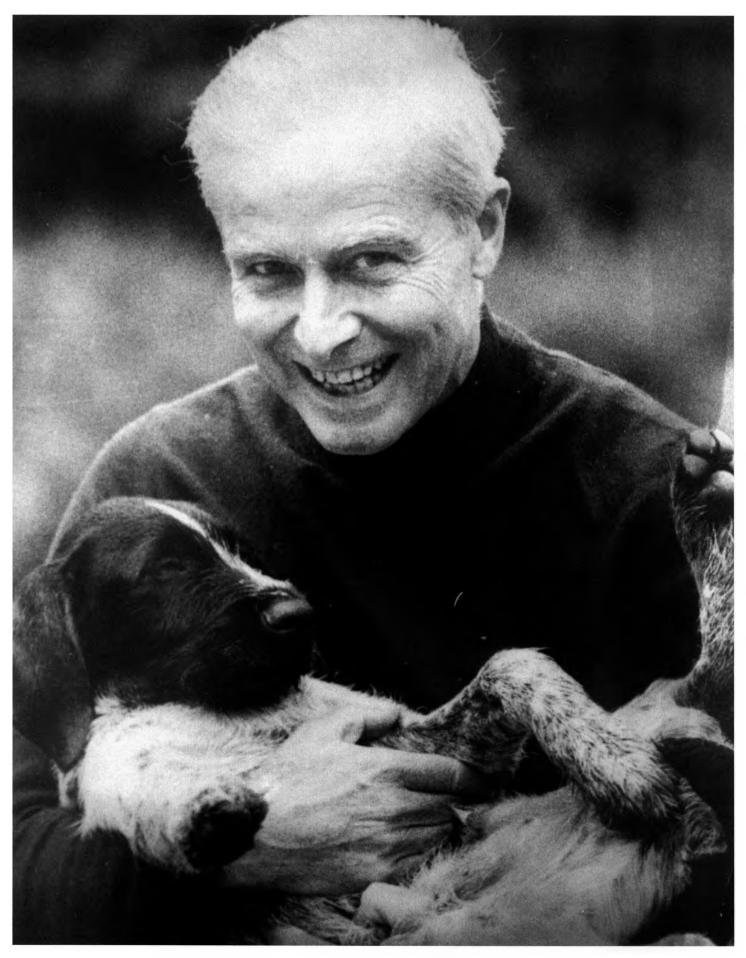


From the right: Kosmehl, Ketelhut, Peiper and inhabitants of Traves.

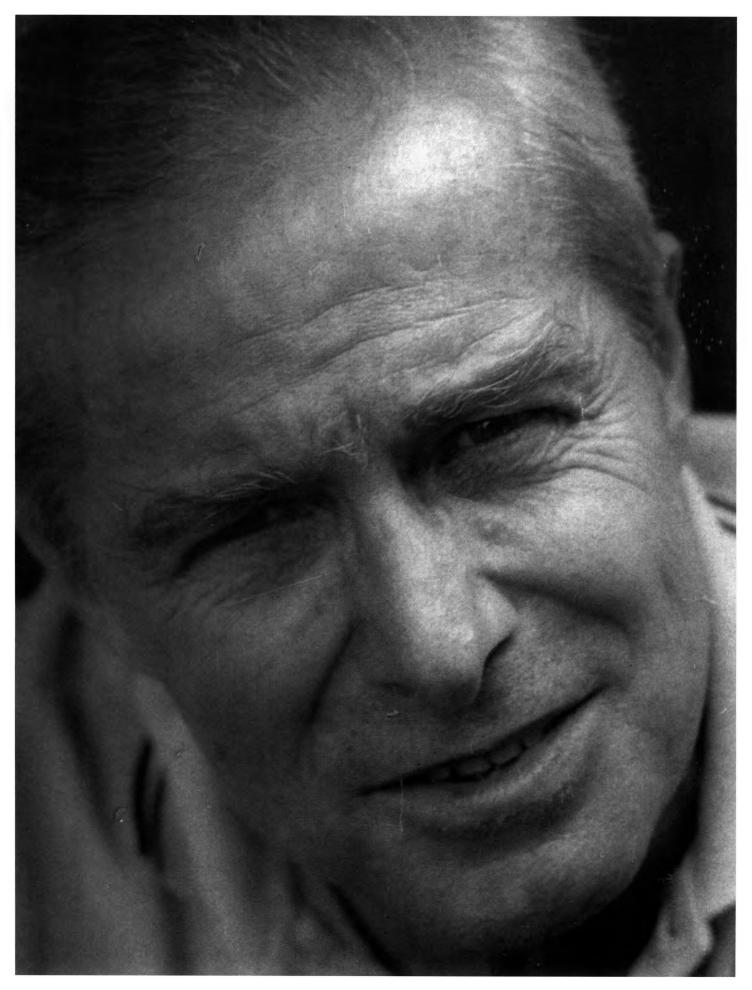




Jochen Peiper in Traves around 1972. He is wearing his old leather jacket, which the Panzer Regiment had received from the Navy at the end of 1943.



Peiper, happy in France, around 1975.





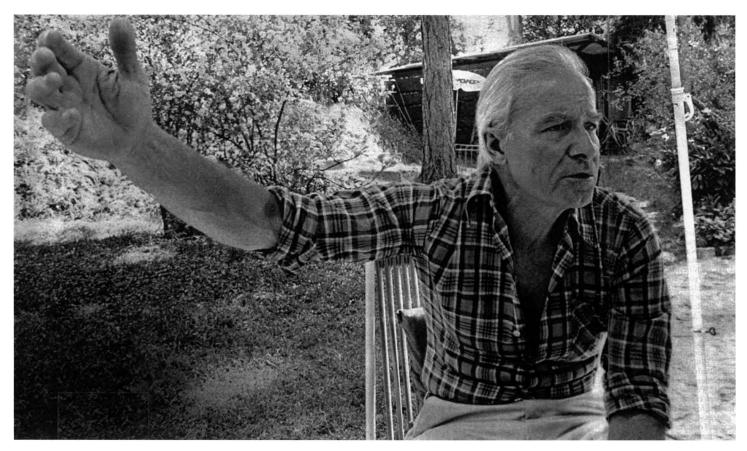
Peiper's persecution began on 22 June 1976 with painting on the road.



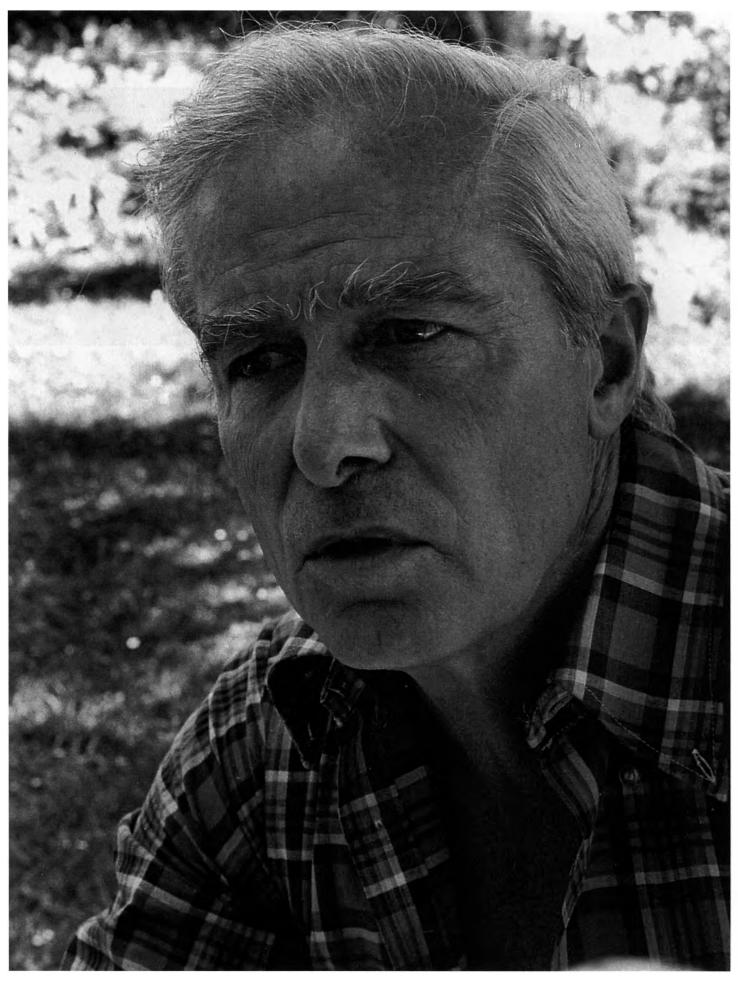
Traves in the summer of 1972. Peiper's radio operator, Fritz Kosmehl (left), came for a visit. Mrs. Peiper (center) and Erwin Ketelhut, Peiper's German neighbor.

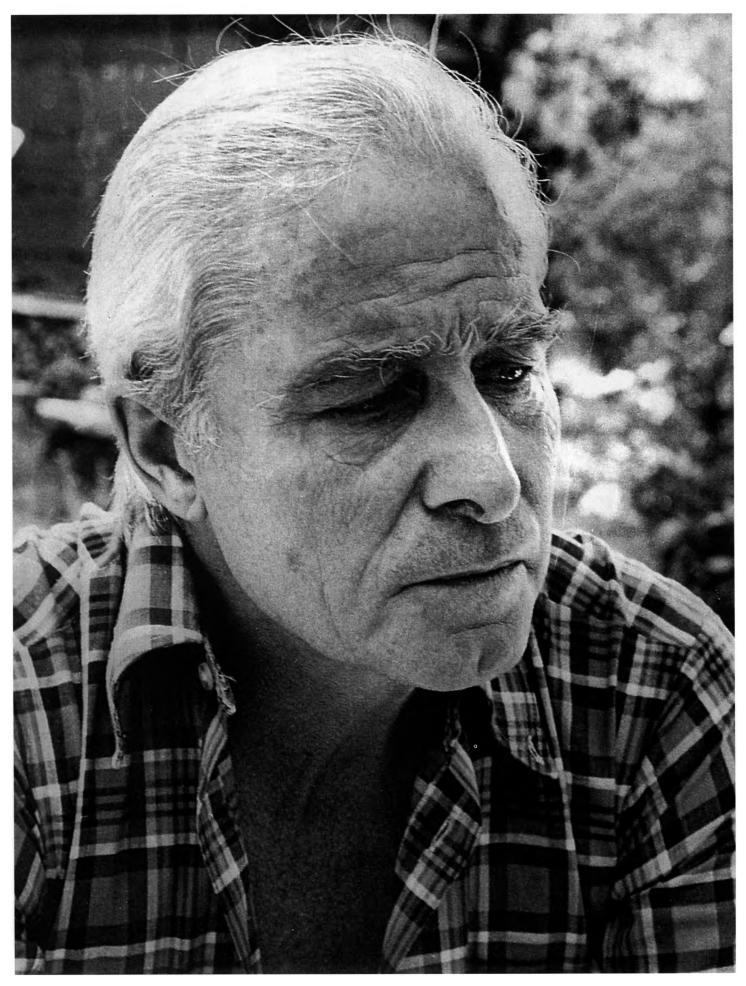


Peiper in front of his house in the summer of 1976.



The last photos of Peiper, taken in his garden at the beginning of June 1976 during an interview with a journalist.







French police officials at the scene of the crime.



Firemen at work on the morning of 14 July 1976.



Mrs. Peiper after attempting to identify her husband on 15 July 1976.



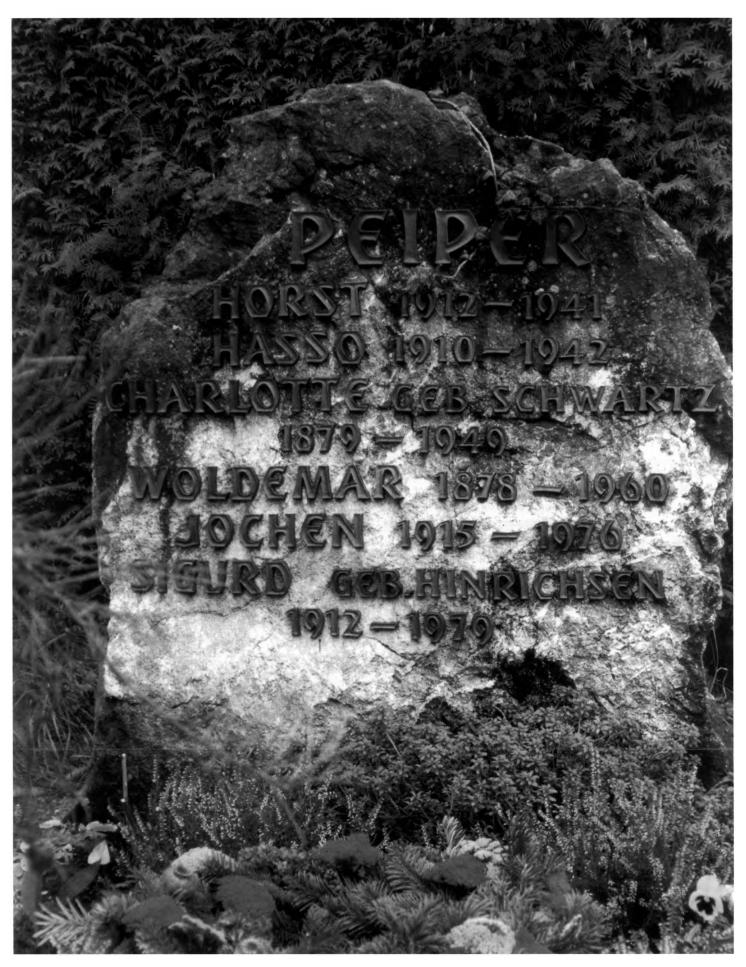
1998: View of the front of the house with the terrace on the right. The refrigerator and stove are still lying in front of the house.

Peiper's dogs, Timm and Tamm, were found on 15 July 1976. One of the dogs showed evidence of gunshot wounds.





Mrs. Peiper died on 10 April 1979.



The family grave of the Peiper's.

#### **Highly Decorated Soldiers Under Peiper's** Command

All those awarded high decorations in the units commanded by Peiper are listed below. Those awarded these decorations either before or after Peiper's period in command are also mentioned.

#### III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

Knight's Cross

9 March 1943 as SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper

and commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

5 February 1945 as SS-Hauptsturmführer Jupp Diefenthal

and commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-

Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

4 June 1944 as SS-Hauptsturmführer and Paul Guhl

> temporarily commanding the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

7 August 1943 as SS-Untersturmführer Werner Wolff

and adjutant of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 (Died of wounds:

30 March 1945)

5 February 1945 as SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß

and commander of the 10. (gep.)/SS-

Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

Nahkampfspange in Gold

Werner Kindler 1 April 1945 as SS-Unterscharführer and

> cannon section leader in the 12. (s. gep.)/ SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

1 September 1944 as SS Hauptsturm-Otto Dinse

führer and commander of the 12. (s. gep.) /SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

1 April 1945 as SS-Unterscharführer and Rudi Knobloch

squad leader in the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-

Grenadier-Regiment 2

1.4.1945 as SS-Obersturmführer and Georg Preuß

commander of the 10. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-

Grenadier-Regiment 2

#### German Cross in Gold

Jupp Diefenthal

Jochen Peiper 6 May 1943 as SS-Sturmbannführer and

commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-

Grenadier-Regiment 2

30 December 1943 as SS-Hauptsturm-Paul Guhl

führer and commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

29 October 1944 as SS-Hauptsturmführer

and commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-

Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

20 April 1945 as SS-Unterscharführer Werner Kindler

> and cannon squad leader in the 12. (s. gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

3 May 1945 as SS-Hauptsturmführer and Otto Dinse

orderly on the staff of the 1. SS-Panzer-

Division "LSSAH"

20 April 1945 as SS-Obersturmführer Georg Preuß

and commander of the 10. (gep.)/SS-

Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

20 April 1945 as SS-Unterscharführer Rudi Knobloch

and squad leader in the 10. (gep.)/SS-

Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

**Honor Roll Clasp** 

Karl Übler 25.2.1945 as SS-Unterscharführer and

> cannon section leader in the 10. (gep.) /SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2

SS-Panzer-Regiment 1

Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross of the

**Iron Cross** 

Jochen Peiper 11 January 1945 as SS-Obersturmbann-

führer and commander of SS-Panzer-

Regiment 1

Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross

Jochen Peiper 27 January 1944 as SS-Obersturmbann-

führer and commander of the SS-Panzer-

Regiment 1

Werner Poetschke 15 March 1945 as SS-Sturmbannführer

> and commander of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (Died of wounds: 24 March

1945)

Michael Wittmann 30 January 1944 as SS-Untersturmführer

and platoon leader in the 13. (schwere) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Swords: 22 June

1944 as SS-Obersturmführer and

commander of the 2./schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 (KIA:8 August 1944)

**Knight's Cross** 

Georg Schönberger December 1943 as SS-Obersturmbann-

> führer and commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (KIA: 20 November 1943

Max Wünsche 28 February 1943 as SS-Sturmbannführer

and commander of the I./SS-Panzer-

Regiment 1

Herbert Kuhlmann 13 February 1944 as SS-Sturmbannführer

and commander of the I. (schwere)/SS-

Panzer-Regiment 1

4 June 1944 as SS-Hauptsturmführer and Werner Poetschke

> as commander of the 1. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (Died of wounds: 24

March 1945)

17 April 1945 as SS-Untersturmführer Konrad Heubeck

and commander of 1. (schwere)/SS-

Panzer-Regiment 1

28 March 1943 as SS-Obersturmführer Wilhelm Beck

> and commander of the 2./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (KIA: 10 June 1944)

28 February 1943 as SS-Oberscharführer Hans Reimling

and platoon leader in the 2./SS-Panzer-

Regiment 1 (KIA: 7 March 1943)

Hans Malkomes	31 October 1944 as SS-Obersturmführer and commander of the 2. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (KIA: 21 March 1945)	Ernst Otto	and commander of the 2nd (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (Died: 1948) 30 December 1944 as SS-Obersturm-führer and commander of the 4.(schwere)
Hans Dauser	4 June 1944 as SS-Oberscharführer and platoon leader in the2. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1	Martin Groß	/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 28 March 1943 as SS-Sturmbannführer and commander of the II./SS-Panzer-
Martin Groß	22 July 1943 as SS-Sturmbannführer and commander of the II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1	Herbert Gauglitz	Regiment 1 28 March 1943 as SS-Oberscharführer while combat engineer platoon leader in
Rudolf v. Ribbentrop	15 July 1943 as SS-Obersturmführer and commander of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1	Theodor Jensen	the headquarters company of the II./SS- Panzer-Regiment 1 6 January 1945 as SS-Oberscharführer
Sepp Armberger	31 October 1944 as SS-Obersturmführer and commander of the 8./SS-Panzer-		and platoon leader in the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1
Heinz Kling	Regiment 1 23 February 1944 as SS-Hauptsturm- führer and commander of the 13.	Walter Malchow	2 September 1943 as SS-Obersturm- führer and platoon leader in the 6./SS- Panzer-Regiment 1
Helmut Wendorff	(schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 12 February 1944 as SS-Untersturm- führer and platoon leader in the 13.	Hans Siptrott	30 December 1944 as SS-Oberscharführer and platoon leader in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1
Michael Wittmann	(schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 30 January 1944 as SS-Untersturmführer	Heinz Kling	30 December 1943 as SS-Hauptsturm- führer and commander of the
	and platoon leader in the 13. (schwere) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (KIA: 8 August 1944)	Honor Roll Clasp	13.(schwere) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1
Balthasar Woll	16 January 1944 as SS-Rottenführer and gunner in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1	Werner Poetschke	5 March 1944 as SS-Sturmbannführer and commander of the I./SS-Panzer- Regiment 1 (Died of wounds: 24 March
Franz Staudegger	10 July 1944 as SS-Unterscharführer and tank commander in the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1	Erich Strelow	1945) 25 February 1945 as SS-Oberscharführer and tank commander in the l. (schwere)/
German Cross in Ge	old		SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (KIA: 19 February 1945)
Herbert Kuhlmann	8 November 1944 as SS-Sturmbann- führer and commander of the I. (schwere) /SS-Panzer-Regiment 1	Fritz Maag	17 December 1943 as SS-Untersturm- führer and platoon leader in the 2./SS- Panzer-Regiment 1
Max Wünsche	25 February 1943 as SS-Sturmbannführer and commander of the I./1st SS-Panzer-Regiment 1	Werner Wolff	5 February 1945 as SS-Obersturmführer and commander of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (Died of wounds: 30 March
Konrad Heubeck	4 June 1944 as SS-Hauptscharführer and platoon leader in the 1. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1	Sepp Armberger	1945) 17 June 1944 as SS-Obersturmführer and commander of the 8./SS-Panzer-
Hans Malkomes	1 June 1944 as SS-Obersturmführer and commander of 2. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-		Regiment 1 and battalion commander in the Kampfgruppe of Generalleutnant
Hans Stübing	Regiment 1 (KIA: 21 March 1945) 13 February 1944 as SS-Obersturmführer		Püchler (KIA: 21 August1944)

#### Peiper's Own Book

The following is the beginning of Peiper's own book, reproduced as he drafted it. These are the only fragments of his work which he was able to save from the flames of the burning house on 14 July 1976. Everything else was burned.

#### **FOREWORD**

This book is to be neither an accusation nor a justification, nor has it arisen from an effort to redeem a lost past. If the author has once again taken the trouble to use the path of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 of the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler to show how justice was silenced along with the sound of battle at the end of the war, this was not for the sake of an adversarial settling of accounts, but rather for that of our common future.

When on 14 November 1945, the victor put all of the German people on trial, it was an innovation in international law. Politically it was for the fulfillment of war aims declared as early as 1942 and practically it was hypocrisy disguised as humanitarianism.

Since then, thirty years have passed. The crusader zeal of that time has been forgotten. New wars of aggression have been fought and new war criminals appeared, without ever again running afoul of a newly constituted and ceremoniously established international trial in Nuremberg.

The Americans are no longer the infallible interpreters of the world conscience and after Vietnam, My Lai and Watergate have lost some of their naive missionary zeal and their shrill self-righteousness.

And much has become normal again in Germany. Her citizens have regained comfort and respect, and no longer need the cries of stop-thief, the certificates of purity and the whipping boy in their midst. But then why root up these old stories? Because at the end of the war, the victors' tribunal in Nuremberg outlawed the entire Waffen-SS by arbitrary decree, a unit twice as large as today's Bundeswehr, and this had the result that even today its members and their families are treated as second class citizens. And also because the declaration of the Waffen-SS as a "criminal organization" was largely based on the Malmedy Trial, a show trial produced and directed in Dachau, which was necessary to create the precedents for the selective condemnation in Nuremberg.

Because at most, the public is only familiar with the names from this trial.

Because old comrades from that time and the young men of today have a right to such a sober and factual description, and finally and conclusively because even a conquered people can't help writing down their history eventually some lovely day, whether it now agrees with contemporary models or not!

Much evil was done under Hitler by Germans or in the German name. That is undeniable. But that doesn't include everything that they try to hang about our necks and which the professional scab scratchers try to perpetuate in the name of restitution.

It is certain that there can be no trustful and unprejudiced common future so long as the victors do not admit that they were no angels either and are unwilling to concede us the good will and the same ideals that they pretend to possess alone.

The Second World War dug a great ditch between winners and losers, between good and evil. If we don't finally manage to bridge it with an honest and trusting handshake, we will fall into it together.

When the victor
Respects the temples
And gods of the vanquished,
Then perhaps they
themselves won't be victims
of their own victory.

Ayschylus

#### INTRODUCTION

16 November 1944. A cold, wet and uncomfortable day. The kind of day when it grows dark early without ever really having been light. Hauptsturmführer Gruhle put down the repair shop report and looked at his watch: 1515 hours. Just enough time for a short visit to one company. They would certainly all be busy packing up and stowing things away, but if the regimental adjutant didn't take advantage of every opportunity, he lost touch with things all too quickly.

Gruhle called for his vehicle, took his motorcycle jacket and belt out of a cupboard, and looked carefully once more out the window for fighter-bombers. Nothing to be heard except for the usual American artillery fire from the direction of Aachen.

The inhabitants of the new assembly area, Weilerswist – Friesheim – Bliesheim, were not exactly delighted when they suddenly heard tanks rattling through their streets the night before. And then at day break, when they discovered that their uninvited guests were from the Waffen-SS, their faces appeared taciturn and closed. That unit meant nothing good, for wherever they appeared, things soon began to hum.

At the time, the 1. SS-Panzer-Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler had been moved from Westphalia into the region south of Cologne in an astonishingly smooth move by rail. It was supposed to be in position in case of an airborne assault or to foil an enemy advance towards the Rhine no further than the Erft Sector.

Really, these people aren't that far wrong, thought the adjutant while he pulled on his gloves and waited impatiently for his driver. Every time the LAH crossed the Rhine to the west, something happened. The first time, in 1935, the regiment moved into Saarbrücken with slung rifles to the tune of the Badenweiler March. To be sure, the people celebrated and threw flowers, but we could have been greeted by hot lead as well. 1940, the second time, we went through Holland and Belgium all the way to the Atlantic. The frightening memories of World War I and its terrible battles of materièl, were shown to be no more than bad dreams. A lasting peace seemed to be within our grasp. Versailles was annulled in the Compiègne Woods and we began to dream of a new European order in a state of euphoria. And, by no means, just the German soldiers! No matter where we went and no matter with whom we spoke, everywhere there was a readiness to come to an understanding, something which had only appeared in similar form so clearly during the Berlin Olympics in 1936.

Then in the spring of 1944, when the Leibstandarte's trans-

port trains had crossed the Rhine for the third time, they carried the remnants of a Panzer division from the pocket of Kamenez - Podolsk to Belgium. As the Landser said bitterly: "With hat, walking stick, and songbook." The proud Panzer regiment had, at the end, only one Tiger and one T-34 at its disposal. It had blown up most of its equipment in the course of the fighting withdrawals which had lasted for months. The tired warriors were given a short "rest" at the delousing station at Lemberg - the German leadership had attributed miracles for some time to the "Russla-Puder," a delousing powder - and, to everyone's amazement, we were loaded onto a train. The Tiger and Russian tank remained behind and, instead, shaggy Polish ponies and the usual Panje carts in the area were rapidly impressed into service to go along with us. The dismounted tankers, who had to carry their things just like the infantry, swore that they certainly weren't going wherever the Panje ponies were.

When they were finally unloaded in Brussels after virtually endless wanderings, the station commander was quite disconcerted as he looked at us in his spotlessly clean uniform: Was that supposed to be the 1st Panzer-Regiment? However, their commander had scarcely left the last transport train, when he received a complaint from the city commandant. The Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment had already passed by the Brussels soldiers' home with a column of Panje wagons – in broad daylight and with the regimental standard up front mounted on a Russian nag. There was to be an immediate investigation for suspicion of demoralization of fighting strength. Customs were still that strict at that point of the war.

This time the city commandant contented himself with the advice that while traveling through the ruins of Cologne, it was forbidden for individual vehicles to travel the streets at night, since attacks by marauding deserters and gangs of youths had to be expected.

It can get even hotter here, Gruhle thought to himself, as he ripped open the crazily rattling window which threatened to fall off. Instead of the individual sounds of impacting rounds, his trained ear could now hear the increasing growl of a carpet bombing. It couldn't be too far away, for he could also hear the droning of the aircraft engines. With one movement, he grabbed the field glasses from the table and reached the attic in a few strides, where he found the owner of the house already at an opening in the roof. "Look there, Herr Hauptmann," said the old man as he pointed at the continuously flashing lightning on the horizon with his work-worn miner's hand. "Beautiful old Düren! No industry, no soldiers, just refugees. I really believe that they want to destroy all that we have."

Indeed, it seemed that the bombing would never end. Wave after wave, and what the ones didn't blow into pieces with high explosive, the other ones set on fire with incendiary bombs. Individual fires flared up, then expanded into area fires, and finally came together in a fire storm over the smashed city. What kind of war is that, each man thought to himself. All the former differences between front and home, between combatant and noncombatant, have been eradicated. Death rushes toward both the soldier and the civilian in the same terrible way, and turns the defender of the fatherland into an anachronism. Where's the sense in it, when you can no

longer protect what you joined up to protect? The orderly officer's voice interrupted the brooding adjutant and called him back to reality and to the telephone. It was the division. The operations officer passed on the news that the regiment was to go help the rescuers with all its wheeled vehicles as soon as the raid was over.

But the entire night was to pass before they got there. Not that the troops weren't in a hurry – quite the opposite! – but the vehicles were either in widely scattered positions and, in some cases, dug into the surrounding patches of woodland or they were already being used for supply trips.

But even during the day, you couldn't get all the way up the edge of the city, as all the roads leading out were clogged with refugees and the entrances were destroyed as if by some Cyclopean hand. All that the helpers could do was to cut a way through gardens and backyards into the inferno, and then pitch in wherever the need was greatest and circumstances permitted. What they saw and experienced during this period defies all description and exceeds any imagination. Even so, the young men worked to the point of collapse, always thinking that tomorrow the same fate could befall their parents and brothers and sisters. But even stronger than the danger, the unbearable heat, and the difficulties in breathing, were the anger and rage everyone felt. "These swine!" was heard in every mouth. "These gangsters! This isn't war any more, but cold-blooded mass murder. If we could only get our hands on them!"

"Yes, my friend, this is a sorry outcome which shows what happens when ideological persecution gets the upper hand in a war" said Peiper a few weeks later when discussing the general situation with Sturmbannführer Poetschke at the latter's command post. "Are there any numbers available yet for Düren?" "Based on what I heard at division today, some 1000 to 1200 four-engine bombers took part in the half-hour attack. The city is over 90% destroyed and they estimate 5000 people died."

"I'd be interested in what Herr Maier thinks of it." (Translator: reference to Hermann Göring) "Him. He is certainly more upset that the Russian are now shooting his stags in Rominten."

"Do you really still believe that we will win the war, Obersturmbannführer?"

"Certainly not. I only hope that we won't have to lose it unconditionally. Haven't I told you about that evening discussion with Goebbels, in April when we were transferred from the east to the west? At that time, I asked the same question. He had exactly the same lack of illusions and dispassionate view of the situation as we do, and said that militarily we were completely finished."

"And why then does he constantly urge us to hold out? Does everything have to be in ruins first?"

"Goebbels is depending on disunity among the Allies and claims to have evidence that the Americans will soon be at loggerheads with the Muscovites. Until then he said, we have to keep going and give the government enough time for political maneuver."

"If we're going to see that, the higher ups are going to have to hurry."

"For my part, I'm not really all that optimistic. They're working on giant maps with ghost armies which haven't existed for a long time and put their trust in miracle weapons."

"Hopefully that includes an engine that will run on water, otherwise, everything is going to shut down here."

"What's morale like in the battalion?"

"Actually, it's astonishingly good, when you consider that this is the fifth year of the war. Naturally there is no question of belief in victory or enthusiasm, let alone fanaticism. Actually, it's a sort of shipwreck morale made up of gallows humor and stubbornness. It is pretty much clear to everyone that the Waffen-SS can expect nothing good from the Russians, but ever since we have been heaped with all that crap and slander by that rotten radio station in Calais, even the stupidest knows what's waiting for us in the west. But before our boys get taken down, they would really like to take a few of them with them."

"The Anglo-Americans must really be blind, to take away any hope of survival from their enemy in this way. It can only make us tougher."

"Apparently, they've learned European history from our emigrants."

"There is some advantage to it. When you have your back to the wall, you can only fall forward." "I'm worried about the low level of training and the low percentage of experienced officers and noncommissioned officers. We've had neither field training nor training as a unit. The temperamental Maybach engines are being driven in part by guys who only have one and half hours of driving experience behind them, and many have never fired a shot. In the rear area, they're combing out the hospitals and are stealing our men for new formations, while the old units are supposed to be made combat ready again out of nothing. If most of us hadn't simply walked away from the convalescent companies to get back to our old bunch, we would be a complete mess."

"Maybe we'll be able to resume driver training on a large scale in the near future."

"How. Is there gas?"

"Nooo, but yesterday General Kraemer, the Chief of Staff for our 6. Army, called me and asked quite hypothetically, what my evaluation of fighting conditions in the Eifel for tanks was and how long I would need for a night march of 80 kilometers."

"And what did you say?"

"I explained, just as hypothetically, that if he would assign me the stretch, I would drive it by night with a Panther."

"Then I wish you a good night!"

Verst. Leibstandarte // Adolf Hitler Wylder, den 31.5.

1.940 .

#### Vorlänfiges Bositzzeugnis.

Am 31. Mai 1940 wurde dem W - Obersturmführer Peiper 11. / L. %. A. H. das Eiserne Kreuz II. Klasse verliehen.

Der Kommandeur der vernt Leibstundarte // Adolf Hitler

Preliminary document for the award of the Iron Cross, 2nd Class to SS-Obersturmführer Peiper. The award is signed by SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich. Date: 31 May 1940.

BES	SITZ-ZI	EUGNIS	
Dem #=#	uptsturmführe		
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INFANTE	RIE - STUI	RMABZEIC	HEN
Metz DEN 7.Sept	1940	SS-OBERGRUPPEN KOMMANDEUR DEF	

Formal award document for the Infantry Assault Badge to SS-Hauptsturmführer Jochen Peiper. The award is signed by SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich. Date: 7 September 1940.



# Im Namen des führers und Obersten Befehlshabers der Wehrmacht

verleihe ich

dem

SS-0.Stuf.

Joachim Peiper

11./LAH.

das

Eiserne Kreuz 2. Klasse.

H.Gef.St.

Louches ,den 31. 5. 1940

Der Kommandierende General

des XIX.Armeekorps

General der Panzertruppe.

(Dienstgrad und Dienststellung)

Formal award document for the Iron Cross, 2nd Class to SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Peiper. The award is signed by General der Panzertruppe Heinz Guderian. Date: 31 May 1940.



# Im Namen des Führers und Obersten Besehlshabers der Wehrmacht

verleihe ich

dem

44 - Hauptsturmführer

Joachim Peiper,

Führer 11./L//AH

das

Eiserne Kreuz 1. Klasse.

Villers-Cotteres ,den 13. Juni 19.40.



Musik

W - Obergruppenführer
Kommendeur der verst. Leibstandate
(Dienftgrad und Dienftflichtet Hitler"

Formal award document for the Iron Cross, 1st Class to SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Peiper. The award is signed by SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich. Date: 13 June 1940.

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Telegraph request to the Führer headquarters for award of the Knight's Cross to SS-Sturmbannführer Joachim Peiper. See main text for a translation of the document. Date: 7 March 1943.

## Yorläufiges Besitzeugnis



# Der Führer und Oberste Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht

hat

SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper,
Kdr.III./2.Pz.Gr.Rgt. L.SS.A.II.

das Kitterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes

am 9.3.1943 verliehen.

hQu OKh, den 11.liarz 1943

Das Oberkommando des Herrs

Generalmajor

Dorläufiges Besitzzeugnis



# Im Namen des Führers und Obersten Besehlshabers der Wehrmacht

verleihe ich dem

SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper Kdr.III./2.Pz.Gr.Rgt.LSSAH

das

Deutsche Kreuz in Gold

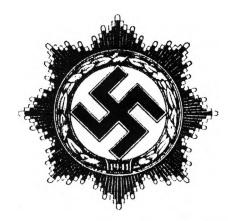
huu uhh, den

6. Mai 1943

וועת טוזון, טנוו

Oberfommando des heeres

Generalfeldmar[djall



# IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS UND OBERSTEN BEFEHLSHABERS DER WEHRMACHT VERLEIHE ICH DEM

外-STURMBANNFÜHRER
JOACHIM PEIPER
HDR. II./2:PZ.GR.RGT. L-//-AH

# DAS DEUTSCHE KREUZ IN GOLD

HAUPTQUARTIER, DEN 6. MAI 1943

**OBERKOMMANDO DES HEERES** 



/ Whit





# Besitzzeugnis

#### eob uit

## Niederkimpfen eines Panzerkampfwagens verleihe ich dem

4-Sturmbannführer

Peiper, Jochem geb. 30.1.15 III./2. Panz.-Gren.-Rgt. Leibstandarte 4 Adolf Hitler

Sonderabzeichen fürdas Niederkämpfen von Panzerkampfwagen durch Einzeltämpfer

0.U., **den** 24. Jpli 1943

nzer-Grenadier-Regiment tandarte 44 Adolf Hitler

Formal award document for the Single-Handed Destruction of an Enemy Tank to SS-Sturmbannführer Jochem Peiper as commander of the III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH. The award is signed by SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, the regimental commander at the time. Date: 24 July 1943.

#### **BESITZZEUGNIS**

DEM.	77-Sturmbannführer
	(DIENSTGRAD)
	Jochem Peiper
***************************************	(VOR- UND FAMILIENNAME)
	Leibst indarte 14 Adolf. Hitler III./2.Punzer-Grenadier-Regiment
	(TRUPPENTEIL)

# VERLEIHE ICH FÜR TAPFERE TEILNAHME AN 15 NAHKAMPFTAGEN

# DIE \_\_\_. STUFE DER NAHKAMPFSPANGE

TO THE WAY TO THE TO TH

Div.Gef.St., de Sept.1943

(UNTERSCHRIFT) Uh-Oberführer und

Divisions-Koumandeur

(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)

#### BESITZZEUGNIS

DEM	44-Sturmbannführer				
D ETT	(DIENSTGRAD)				
	Jochen	n ]	Peiper		
		(VOR-	UND	FAMI	LIENNAME)
	III. (	(gp.)	1	2.	PanzGrenRgt.Ih/AH
	***************************************	(	TRU	PPEN	TEIL)

#### VERLEIHE ICH FÜR TAPFERE TEILNAHME AN 30 NAHKAMPFTAGEN

# DIE II. STUFE DER NAHKAMPFSPANGE



Formal award document for the Close Combat Clasp (2nd level: 30 days) to SS-Sturmbann-führer Jochem Peiper as commander of the III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH. The award is signed by SS-Obersturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, the regimental commander at the time. Date: 1 September 1943.

Fernfprud . Fernfchreiben . Funtfprud . Bligtfprud Beforbert Dadr. Stelle Tag Beit Rolle burch Bermerte: Beit Zag pon 0015 12.1. Abfenbenbe Stelle Abgang Un Zag: 11.1. Beit: (2300) Hunet Dringlichteitspcr Berufpred acc releine. Jac atadec era luce Act of Hi

Telegram notification of the winning of the Oak Leaves for SS-Obersturmbannführer Peiper.

Date: 11 January 1944.

## mamman man



mamman mulin

Das

#### Deutsche Kreuz in Gold

wurde verliehen an:

#-Hauptsturmführer Hans Waldmüller,

Bataillons-Führer in einem #-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

#-Sturmbannführer Joachim Peiper, Bataillons-Kommandeur in einem #-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

#-Obersturmbannführer Christian Hansen,

Kommandeur eines #-Pionier-Bataillons

#-Hauptsturmführer Hubert Meyer,
Bataillons-Führer in einem #-Panzer-GrenadierRegiment

#-Hauptsturmführer Arnold Jürgensen,

Kompanie-Führer in einem #-Panzer-Regiment

#-Hauptsturmführer Günther Wöst, Kompanie-Chef in einer #-Panzer-Jäger-Abteilung

#-Untersturmführer Johann Wachter,

Zugführer in einer 4-Panzer-Jäger-Abteilung

#-Hauptscharführer Ferdinand Fellhauer,

Zugführer in einem #-Pionier-Bataillon

Leutnant Franz Eckert,

Kompanie-Führer in einem Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon

Oberfeldwebel Fritz Schwirblat, Zugführer in einem Panzer-Regiment Feldwebel Hermann Alvermann, Zugführer in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

Hauptmann Wilhelm Buschmann, Adjutant eines Panzer-Grenadier-Regiments

Stabsarzt

Robert Dr. Dr. Mühl-Kühner, Abteilungsarzt in einem Panzer-Regiment

Oberleutnant Hans Schumacher, Kompanie-Chef in einem Panzer-Grenadier-

Hauptmann Friedrich-Wilhelm Wrede,

Bataillons-Kommandeur in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

Oberleutnant d. R. Herbert Maiwald,

Kompanie-Chef in einem Panzer-Regiment

Oberfeldwebel Günther Conrad,

Zugführer in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

Oberleutnant Otto Schepull,

Bataillons-Adjutant in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

Unteroffizier Artur Menzel,

Gruppenführer in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

Hauptmann d. R. Karl Roser,

Kompanie-Chef in einem Gebirgs-Jäger-Regiment

with the time time was my will will will the

Er wurde bereits am 5.11.1942 als Chef nach Nennung seiner Kompanie im Wehrmachtsbericht wegen vorbildlicher Führungseigenschaften und wiederholter persönlicher Tapferkeit mit dem Deutschen Kreuz in Gold ausgezeichnet.

Bei den schweren Winterkämpfen 1943/44 war 17-Hauptsturmführer Poets chik etepfer und krisenfest, an allen Erfolgen des Regimentes massgeblich beteiligt und wurde nach erlittener dritter, vierter und fünfter Verwundung mit den Verwundetenabzeichen in Gold ausgezeichnet.

Während der Ausbruchskämpfe der eingeschlosseren 1.Panzerarmee vom 4.III. - 7.IV.44 führte W. Hauptsturmführer Poetschke die gepanzerte Gruppe der Division und hat hierbei, ständig mit wenigen Kampfwagen Angriffe und Gegenstösse fahrend, an den Erfolgen der Division in Angriff und Abwehr erheblichen persönlichen Anteil.

Beim Übergang über den N i c z l a w a - Abschnitt bildete das mit starken russischen Kräften besetzte Dorf D a w i d k o w c e einen starken Sperriegel. Nachdem der Angriff der 19.Panzer - Division am 1.April morgens infolge des starken Schneetreibens und gegenüber hartem Feindwiderstand beiderseits der Strasse D a v i d k o w c e - L o s i a c z wegen völliger Ersshöpfung der Grenadiere liegengeblieben war, wurde der Angriff mit Unterstützung zweier Kampfgruppen der Grenadierregimenter l und 2 und der gepanzerten Gruppe des 1-Hauptsturnführers P o e t s c h-k e am gleichen Tage gegen 1600 Uhr neu angesetzt. Unter Abschirmung des Feinddruckes aus dem Walde südlich der Strasse durch die Kampfgruppe des Grenadier-Regimentes l erreichte der 1-Hauptsturmführer P o e t s c h k e mit 2 Panthern und der ihm unterstellten Kampfgruppe des Regiments 2 -insgesamt 40 Grenadierein verhältnismässig kurzer Zeit den ostwärtigen Dorfrand von D e v i d k o w c e und drang nach hartem Häuserkampf in diesen Ortsteil eim, blieb hier aber gegenüber heftigem Feindwiderstand liegen.

Obwohl die Kampfgruppe Poetschke durch Ausfall eines Kampfwagens und zahlreicher Mannschaftsverluste erheblich geschwächt war, entschloss sich M-Hauptsturmführer P o e ts ch k e zur Fortsetzung des Angriffs. Es gelang ihm, sich zu lösen, den Ort nördlich zu umgehen und von Nordwesten her gegen 0400 Uhr morgens überraschend einzubrechen und bis über die Hauptstrasse

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in den budteil einzudringen.

Durch diesen unvermiteten Einbruch entstand unter den Russen eine Panik, sodaß sie, obwohl in Hauptsturmführer Poetschke den Häuserkampf nur noch mit seinem Befehlspanther und 10 Grenadieren fortsetzte, den Ort Hals über Kopf unter Zurücklassung von zahlreicher Beute räumten. Nach zweieinhalbstündigem härtesten Kampf war die Ortschaft fest in der Hand der wenigen Grenadiere und wurde gegen alle Gegenangriffe gehalten.

Bei der Einnahme von Davidkowcze wurden erbeutet bezw. vernichtet:

- 5 Fz. Jäger SFL 7,62, 2 Fak 7,62, 6 Fak 4,7, 4 s.I.G. 12,2, 8 Panzerbüchsen, 14 Granatwerfer, 8 s.M.G., 25 Panjewagen, 4 IKW,
- 156 gezählte Tote und 2 Gefangene.

Mit der Einnahme von Davidkowcze wurde die Voraussetzung für den ungehinderten Übergang der 1. Panzerarmee über den Miczlawa-Abschnitt nach Westen geschaffen. Die Bedeutung dieser hervorragenden Leistung fand in einem Handschreiben des Herrn Kommandierenden Generals, Generalleutnant Nehring, seine besondere Würdigung.

Der 44-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke wird wegen seiner ständigen höchsten Bewährung vor dem Felnde, seiner stets und hier im besonderen gezeigten außergewöhnlichen Tapferkeit und wegen der bei der Einnahme von Davidkoweze bewiesenen außerordentlich starken Entschlußkraft der Auszeichnung mit dem

Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes

für würdig gehalten.

Das Panzerregiment bittet, dem #-Hauptsturmführer Poetschke diese hohe Auszeichnung verleihen zu wollen.

11-Obersturmbannführer und Regiments - Kommendeur

Request for the award of the Knight's cross to SS-Hauptsturmführer Werner Poetschke signed by SS-Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper while serving as the regimental commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 LSSAH.

# VORLÄUFIGES BESITZZEUGNIS



# DER FUHRER

HAT DEM

SS-Haupisturmführer Poetschke Chef 1./SS-Pz.Rot. 1 "LSSAH"

#### DAS RITTERKREUZ

DES EISERNEN KREUZES

AM 4.6.1944 VERLIEHEN

HQu OKH, DEN 7. Juni 1944.



**OBERKOMMANDO DES HEERES** 

I.A.

GENERALLEUTNANT

#### BESITZZEUGNIS

DEM

SS - Sturmbannführer
(Diensterad)

Worner Foetschke
(vor. und familienname)

I. ) 35 - Panzer - Regiment 1 "LSSAH" (TRUPPENTEIL)

VERLEIHE ICH FÜR TAPFERE TEILNAHME AN 15 NAHKAMPFTAGEN

# DIE 1. STUFE DER NAHKAMPFSPANGE



Rgt.Gef.Std., den 15.11.1944

Der Kommandeur SS-Panzer-Regiment 1
"Leibstanderte SS Adolf Hitler"

(UNTERSCHRIFT)

(DIENSTERAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG) SS-Ober sturmbanagührer

#### **BESITZZEUGNIS**

DEM SS-Rottenführer (DIENSTGRAD)				
Paul	Zwig	art		
	(VOR- UN	ID ZUNAME)	•••	
L.SS.A.H.	11. (gp.)	SS-Panz.Gren.Rgt. 2		
	(TRUP	PENTEIL)		

#### **WURDE DAS**

### KRAFTFAHR-BEWÄHRUNGSABZEICHEN

IN Gold

VERLIEHEN.

(STPMPEL)

(UNTERSCHRIFT

SS-Stubef.u.Rgt.Kor. i.V

(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)



### IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS UND OBERSTEN BEFEHLSHABERS DER WEHRMACHT

VERLEIHE ICH DEM

44-Rottenführer

Paul Z wigart.

11./1-Panz.Gren.-Rgt. 2 "LHAH"

### DAS EISERNE KREUZ 1. KLASSE

Div.Gef.Std., den 5.5. 10 44

Der Kommandemr der 1. 14-Panzer-Division



#### BESITZZEUGNIS

Paul Zwigart

(vor. und pamilienname)

III.//-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 II/AH

(TRUPPENTEIL)

# VERLEIHE ICH FÜR TAPFERE TEILNAHME AN ....30...... NAHKAMPFTAGEN

# DIE 11. STUFE DER NAHKAMPFSPANGE



Rgts.Ger und den 27.10.1944

(UNTERSCHRIFT

11-Obersturmeannführer und Rate Kommandeur

# Besitzeugnis

Dem							
	Fritz Thier						
	(Bor- und Juname)						
	11. / 2.Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment						

murbe bas

# Panzerkampfabzeichen

- Bronze -

verliehen.



Rgt.Gef.St.,den 20. 4.1943

(Ort unt Delum)

(Untersprift)

14-Standartenführer u.
Rgt.-Kommandeur

(Dienfigrab und Dienfistellung)

#### 639

# IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS UND OBERSTEN BEFEHLSHABERS DER WEHRMACHT

IST DEM

SS-Rottenführer Wilhelm Thier 9.(gp.) SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt.2 LSSAH.

AM 25.August 1942

# DIE MEDAILLE WINTERSCHLACHT IM OSTEN 1941/42 (OSTMEDAILLE)

VERLIEHEN WORDEN.



FUR DID RICHTICKEIT:

SS-Sturmbennführer

und Rgts.Kdr. i.V.

### **BESITZZEUGNIS**

DEM	• •	7-Rottenfuhrer						
	(DIENS							 
	Fritz	-		_	_	_		
	(VOR- UND F							 

Leibstandarte W Adolf Hitler/11./2.Pz.Gr.Rgt.

VERLEIHE ICH FÜR TAPFERE TEILNAHME
AN 15 NAHKAMPFTAGEN

# DIE 1. STUFE DER NAHKAMPFSPANGE



Rgts.Gef St.,den 1.9.1943

ORTUND TUM)

(UNTERSCHRIFT)

14-Obersturmbannführer u.

Rgt.-Kommandeur

(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)

## BESITZZEUGNIS

#### Im Namen des Führers

wurde dem 44-Pionier

(Dienstgrad)

Fritz Thier, geb. 17.4.1923

(Vor-und Familienname)

3./Pi.Btl.L., A.H.

der Krimschild verliehen.

**A. H. Qu**., 15, 36 ft., ..., 3

(Ort und Datum)



Generalfeldmarschall

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### **BESITZZEUGNIS**

DEM	SS-Rottenführer (DIENSTGRAD)
	Fritz Thier (VOR- UND FAMILIENNAME)
11. (gp.	) SS-Panz Gran Rgt 2 LSSAH (TRUPPENTEIL)

## 

# DIE 11. STUFE DER NAHKAMPFSPANGE

Rgts.Ceff.St., den 5 6 1944

(ORT UND DATE)

(UNTERSCHRIFT)

SS-Stubef.u.Rgt.Wir.i.v.

# 641

# Besitzzeugnis

# Dem

%—Rottenführer Alfred Benick
[Name, Dienstgrad]

12./2. Panz.-Gren.-Rgt. L. . A. H. (Truppenteil, Dienstiftelle)

# ift auf Grund

seiner am ... 15. März ... 1943 erlittenen ... ein maligen Derwundung — Beschädigung das

# Derwundetenabzeichen

in ......S.C.H.W.A.R.Z..... verliehen worden.

Rgts.-Gef.-St., den ... April... 19.43.



45-Standartenführer

u. Rgt.-Kommandeur

[Dienstgrad und Dienststelle]

# **BESITZZEUGNIS**

DEM		11-Rott	teni	ľül	are	er		
	••••••	(DIENS	TGRA	D)				
	1	Alfred	В	е	n	i	С	k
	()	VOR- UND FA	AMILII	ENN	AME	)	•••••	
Leibstandarte	77	Adolf	ИiI	110	D L.Y	/1;	) . • ,	/2.Pz.Gr.Ret
		TRUPP	ENTE	IIA		•••••	• • • • • • •	******************************

# VERLEIHE ICH FÜR TAPFERE TEILNAHME AN 15 NAHKAMPFTAGEN

# DIE 1. STUFE DER NAHKAMPFSPANGE





Formal award document for the Close Combat Clasp (1st level: 15 days) to SS-Rottenführer Alfred Benick. Date: 1 September 1943.

# Besitzeugnis

Dem	4-Rottenführer
	(Dien[igrad)
	Alfred B e n i c k
	(Bor- und Juname)
	12./2.Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment
	(Truppenteil)

wurde bas

# Panzerkampfabzeichen

— Bronze —

verliehen.



Rgt.Gef.St., den 20.4.1943.

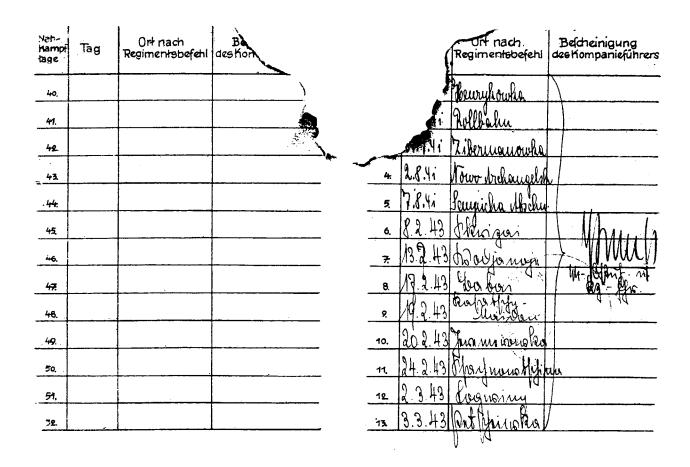
(Ort.mb Datum)

(Unterfarifi)

14-Standartenführer u.

Rgt.-Kommandeur.

(Dienftgrab und Dienftstellung)



Nan- hampf lage	Tag	Ort riach Regimentsbefehl	des ho		Ort nach Regimentabetent	Bescheinigung des Kompanieführers
1,4.	4.3.43	Haustynos		é		
15.	6.3.43	from rouska		[ £6		
<b>16</b> ,	8.3.43	H. RuwHylik		29.		
17.	9.3.43	Gin bortin		30.		
18.	12.3. 43	Gax hum	1 112	31.		
19.	13.3.43	7	Mount	32.		
¥0.	14.3.43	(1	Jumay	33.		
21.	6.7.43	hhamomo	Jah Wini.	34.		
22.	8.7.43	Rylohy /	try of w	35.		
23.	11.7.43	Wayn 252/2				
24.	12.7.43	I way or one has		37.		
25.	14.7.43	Ruja 252,2	<i>大型</i>	38.		
26.	,	<u> </u>		342		

An den

4-Rottenführer

Benick, Alfred, geb. 20.2.1922

12. / 2. Panz.-Gren.-Rgt. LihAH

# Beförderung!

- 1. Jch befordere Sie 3um 44 Unterscharführer
- 2. Tag der Beförderung ist der 1.9.1943

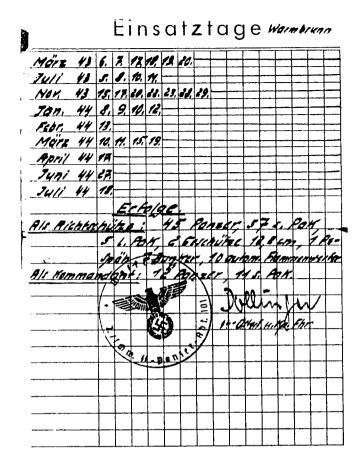
Der Kommandeut der Leibstandarte 44 Adolf Hiller

i.V. // // WWJ

44-Obersturmbannführer.

1470

Bestätigte Panzerkampftage und Abschußerfolge von SS-Unterscharführer Karl-Heinz Warmbrunn von der 13. (s.)/SS-Panzerregiment 1 und 2./SS-Panzerabteilung 101



Confirmed close-combat days and confirmed "kills" for SS-Unterscharführer Karl-Heinz Warmbrunn of the 13. (schwere)/SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and 2./SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101.

13.(s)/4-Panz.Rgt.1, I44AH.

0.U., den 11.12.1943

### Vorläufiges - Besitzzeugnis.

Dem 44-Sturmmann Karl-Heinz Warmbrunn wurde am 5. 12. 1943 durch den Regimentskommandeur des 44-Panzerregiments 1, L. 44 A.H., 45-Sturmbannführer Peiper, das



Hauptsturmführer i Kompnniecher

Preliminary notification for award of the Iron Cross, 1st Class for SS-Sturmmann Karl-Heinz Warmbrunn. Date: 5 December 1943.





### IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS

VERLEIHE ICH DEM

44 -Schutze

Josef Rössner

13.(s)/M-Panzer-Regiment 1 "LMAH"

DAS

2. KLASSE

Div.Gef.Std. den 30.Januar 19 44

Der Kammandeur der 1. 14-Fanzer-Division "L44AH"

44-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waften-4

(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)



### IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS UND OBERSTEN BEFEHLSHABERS DER WEHRMACHT

VERLEIHE ICH DEM

1-Schütze

Josef Rößner

13.(s)//-Panzer-Regiment 1 (IMAH"

DAS

1. KLASSE

Div.Gef.Std. den 18.Januar<sub>19</sub>44

Der Agmmandeur der 1. 14-Panzer-Division "Lijah"

Generalmajor der Waffen-14

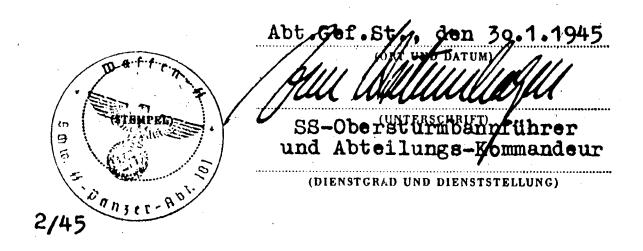
Formal award document for the Iron Cross, 2nd Class to SS-Schütze Josef Rößner. Date: 30 January 1944.

# BESITZZEUGNIS

DEM	SS-Unt	·····	·						
	Josef	R	ö	В	n	•	r		
•••••••	(VOR-	UND	FAI	(ILI	ENN	AME	)		***********
	2. /s.SS	=P	an	Z . j	Abt	; <b>,</b>	501		
***************************************		(TRU	PPE	NTE	IL)		*******	**************	
VERLE	IHE ICH F	ÜR	. T	Αŀ	PF.	EF	RE TEI	LNAE	IME

# AN 25 EINSATZTAGEN

# DIE II . STUFE ZUM PANZERKAMPFABZEICHEN IN SILBER



Formal award document for the Tank Assault Badge in Silver (2nd level: 25 days) to SS-Unterscharführer Josef Rößner of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501. Date: 30 January 1945.

Bestätigte 52 Panzerkampftage von SS-Unterscharführer Otto Fischer von der 6./SS-Panzerregiment 1

Erläuterungen

37.9

Confirmed tank combat days for SS-Unterscharführer Otto Fischer of the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.

für (Jett)

Verplegangsgelary 4.45 wehrsold 30.4.45

Ros.-Cazarett XX B. wien XIN/89, Speilinger Straße 109

194 5 199 5 Einhexsseife f. 35 44 194 5

am

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		Hole 170,	2 Wife		
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	ILIE				

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4. 7. 7. 44 mas	chick .		40	44	H, K, L, 1km Hohe 515, and	
3. 12.1.47 Sie			41.	1.4.45	Sichenorg	13 3
6. 73. 7. 44 Sine	constitue	. [	42		der Absetz	
- 20.7 44 Jea	Hohe 72		43.		Bildung d.	
8 22.7.44 Jean	Holes EZ	37	i, ag	17.2.4	5Angriff a	uf
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10	pleasent 34	Druf is My K	46	19.2.	Angriff au Parkany-N	
9.8.44 Bar	thelisey "	3/	47.	20.2.	Angriff au	A CALL
2 10.8.44 Boa	i foloil		10	21.2.	Köhid-Gyar Angriff vau	
. 6.7.43 Tak	tori Ceio		48	45.	Konia-Gyar	
- Q1	laker	4.	45	613.45.	Mensy	ET.
7 11, 2,		.,n	46	0.4.45	hopeday	
5 9.7.43 Scho				11.4.45	200	1/ 1/2 / 1/2
. 11.7.43 Hole	a 187.2	14	-		T Vr.	THE WAY
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27. 12.7.43	Hochain auto	4-osley is the	- -	44- 3,44	Mya. fil	yer 1
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27. 12.7.43 28. 16.14.44 29. 14.14.44	Vorklang auf to Lug. aaf Sulling	n-order in sh	71		fairinge	franche
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27. 12.7.44 28. 16.14.44 29. 14.14.44 30. 18.14.44 31. 19.14.44 32. 60.14.44 33. 61.14.44 34. 64.14.44 35. 63.14.44	Machain and the lugh and the sur- lugh and the sur- the bill to a a . A. the lift to any. Journay La & . Turke		50,	23.4.45	Fairupe Run 200	Hone le

Confirmed tank combat days for SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Stiller, 7. And 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (from Normandy).

Confirmed tank combat days for SS-Rottenführer Gerhard Höpp of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 (Normandy 1944). Confirmed by SS-Obersturmführer Stiller.

SS-	Ustuf.	Stille	r , Gerhard
Tanz KampT- tage	Tag	Ort nach Rgtgef.	Bescheinigun des AbtKdr
1	25.7. 1944	yally "	SS-Gurnoaun
2	1.8. 1944		de office and
3	14.8. 1944	Joue (1)	S Su Arbann
4	15.8. 1944	La Chaux	Sa-summann
5	16.8. 1944	St Heurs	Side Otu Haden
6	17.8. 1944	Pavers	Su-siff dalabam.
7	19.8. 1944	Chamb	.bs-Xurmban
9 8	20.8. 1944	S & Samme vice	<u> ಮ-ಭ (u ) (u )</u>
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i			
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	<u> </u>		

Bestätigte Panzerkampftage von SS-Rottenführer Gerhard Höpp von der 5./SS-Panzerregiment 1 aus der Normandie, 1944

Tag:	Ort nach	Bescheinig d.Komp.rh	un Kampi-	Tag:	Ort nach Rgt.Raighl	Bescheinigu
16.7.	Hohe 112		13	15.8. 19 <del>44</del>	la Court	J. J. L.
20.7.	Verrieres		14	1944	St.G.61	Jas Vadu
21.7. 1944	Verrieres	Wales	-		نعور	<b>*</b>
22.7. 1944	Verrieres	STORE	:	ř	-	-
23.7. 1944	Verriens	D. Th	- japan	ONO TORREST		
24.7. 1944	Verriere	ras still	=			
25.7.	Verrieres	a soldila		-		-
2.8 6.8.44 9.8.	docquancourt	THE STATE OF THE S	<u>.</u> —			
1944	Le Abbaye Blanche	- Salary	:		-	
10.8.	Le Abbado Blancha	The War			-	
11.8. 1944	Le Abbay & Blanch	Syntati	<u>.</u> —			
14.8. 1944	Joue de Bois	- State				

#### Antrag

auf Verleihung des Panzerkampfabzeichen "Nächsthöhere Stufe"

Vor-und Zuname:	Gert Jahn,
Dienstgrad:	4-Obersturmführer
Truppenteil:	3. (schw.) h-Panz. Rgt. 1 "LhAH"
Kampfeinsätze:	
1.) 10.11.1943	Markarowka-Andruski-Kamionka
2.) 11.11. "	Popelnia-Parypsy-Koszanka
3.) 12.11. "	Trylis-Piwni-Dmitrowka-Mochnatscha-Korn
4.) 15.11. "	Lissowia-Ssolowjewka
5.) 16.11. "	Dubrowija-(Sonderunternehmen 2. Kompanie)
	Kotscherowo
6.) 17.11. "	Pilipouka-Priworotje
7.) CU.LL.	
0.) 61.11.	Oserjaty
9.7 20.11.	Ssobolew-Potaschnja
10.) 6.12. "	Pekarschtschina-Styrty-Kaitanowka
11.) 7.12. "	Kaitancwka-Chodory
12.) 8.12. "	Chodory-Ssabolot
13.) 9.12. "	Ssabol(t-Masheritschka
14.) 10.12. "	Masheritschka-Mel.Ratscha
15.) 11.12. "	Masheritschka-Krasnoborka-Mel-Ratscha.
16.) 14.12. "	Medeleka-Jskra-Federowka
7. 5.1944	Sichering d. Absetzbewegung nach Bagdanwok
	Gegenargriff z. Öffnung d. Rückzugstrasse.
8. 3. "	Sicherung d. Absetzbewegung nach Kupel,
	Gegenamriff in Kupel z.Abwehr d.Feindang auf Kupl.
L9.) 10. 3. "	Sauberung von Losowa u. Kampf geg. Feindpar
	in Woitwezy, Gegenstoß auf Bhf. Woitowezy
20.) 12. 3. "	Sicherug d. Absetzbewegung nach Ssolomne
21., 13. 3. "	Angriff auf Rypna-Serbinoff-Petrowka
2.) 10.3. "	Einbruc u. Durchkämmung d. Ortes Petrowka
2.7 1. 0.	
23.) 23. 3. "	Sicherug der später zurückgenommenen HKI
-J•1 CJ• J•	Sicherulg von Satanoff u.der Absetzbewegu
0/1 ) 37 3 11	der Divisionen.
24.) 31. 3. "	Angriff auf Höhe 300 bei Linzki, dur Unte
5 1 /1 /1 11	statzung der 68.J.D.
25.) 4.4. "	Angriff auf Waldstück nordwestl. Hushtin, u
	den bei 98.J.D.eingebrochenen Feind zu so
	u.zurückzuwerfen.

Hauptsturmführer u.Abt.Kdr.

Von SS-Obersturmführer Werner Sternebeck aufgestellte Panzerkampftage der 6./SS-Panzerregiment 1 während der Plattenseeoffensive und den Rückzugskämpfen durch Westungarn. Die Kompanie wurde im April 1945 in Österreich in 3./SS-Panzerregiment 1 umbenannt

#### 3./ 1, 12. kgt. 1 "1/1AH"

O.U., den 10.5.45

Betr.: Anerkennung der Panzer-Kampftage

#### 17-Panzer Egt. 1 "It AH"

Die 3./ 1 Pz. Rgt. 1 "LAH" bittet um Amerkennung folgender Panzer-Kampftage:

- 6.3.45 Angriff über Höhe 149 auf Kalosz
- 7.3.45 Angriff über Kalosz auf Soponia
- 8.3.45 Angriff über Hatwannspußta, Pußta-Egres auf Emontornya
- 9.3.45 Sicherung und Abwehr feindl. Pauzer- und Infanterie-Angriff nömlich Simonornya
- 10.3.45 Sicherung und Abwehr feindicher Panzer- und Infanterie-Argriffe nördlich Simontnya
- 11.3.45 Angriff auf Simontornya
- 20.3:45 Sicherung und Abwehr feindl. Panzerangriffe Ostwarts und nördlich Inota
- 21.3.45 Sicherung und Abwehr feindl. Panzerangriffe ostw. Inota Varpalota
- 22.3.45 Sicherung Höhe 172 und Angriff auf Rollbahn nach Veszprem aördlich Liter
- 23.3.45 Abwehr feindl. Panzerangriffe ostw. Weszprem und Marko
- 24.3.45 Abwehr feindl. Parzerangriffe ostw. Herend und Varoslöd
- 25.3.45 Abwehr feindl. Panzer- und Infanteireangriffe bei Kislöd
- 26.3.45 Abwehr feindl. Panzerangiffe bei Ajka-Rendek
- 27.3.45 Abwehr feindl. Panzerangriffe bei Noslop und Gegenstoß
- 28.3.45 Abwehr und Sicherung bei Merseva
- 29.3.45 Abwehr feindl. Infanterieangriffe in der Raab-Stellung
- 30.3.45 Abwehr femal. Infanter leangriffe in der Raab-Stellung

19/4 Kas

Kompanie-Führer

Sernichreibname Caufendo IIr.		
Angenommen  Aufgenommen  Datum: f f 194  um: 13 5 146  von: Iskuf, Junishle  durch: Alice fee	Beföroert:  Datum: 7. 8. 194. 3  um: 1350 uhr  an: 43/X/Fu  durch: Alerner  Rolle:	198
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	ic. pers, d	Ly, d. techners
SS-COBERFUEHRER WIS DER FUEHRER HAT DE	I. DIV.,,LEIBSTANDAR CH.= M SS- USTUF. WERNER I. RGT., AM 7.8.43 ERLIEHEN	w O L F F ,

#### Sources

#### The Peiper Family Origins

- 1 Woldemar Peiper's Research Results in the genealogical Herald Verein, in the German Lineage Hand Book
- 2 See 1.
- 3 Courier from the Riesengebirge, 3 April 1896.
- 4 Woldemar Peiper's memories, recorded by Detlev Peiper.
- 5 All service positions are taken from various rank lists of the Royal Prussian Army after 1905.
- 6 WASt 114.736 984.
- 7 Dienstalterliste Royal Prussian Army 1917.

#### Joachim Peiper's Youth in Berlin, 1915 to 1935

- 1 Land Registry Administration Berlin, 28 December 1925.
- 2 Detlev Peiper Family Chronicle.
- 3 Personnel Files of Jochen Peiper.
- 4 Personnel Files of Horst Peiper.
- 5 Curriculum vitae of Jochen Peiper, 21 December 1934.
- 6 Curriculum vitae of Horst Peiper, 1937.
- 7 See 3.
- 8 Curriculum vitae of Jochen Peiper 12 March1939.
- 9 As 8 from 14 January 1934.
- 10 As 6.
- 11 4 November 1936: Questionnaire to supplement officer file.
- 12 See2
- 13 See 9.
- 14 See 6.
- 15 See 5.
- 16 Development of the SS-Cavalry, undated statement of the cavalry officer von Woykosky-Budeaus (Archiv Tobias).
- 18 Das Schwarze Korps, 16 June 1934.
- 20 Lombard 1979.
- 21 As 5.
- 22 See 3.
- 23 Das Schwarze Korps. Peiper's Interrogation by US 3rd Army on 28 August 1945.
- 24 See 9.
- 25 Contributing members of the SS, Volume 7/44.
- 26 personal statement of Walter Pitsch, Dr. Bernhard Frank: 29 July 1997.
- 27 See 3.
- 28 Information on Conditions of Enlistment for the SS-VT.
- 29 Information on an Officer Career in the SS.
- 30 Order SS-FHA MA RS 4/622.
- 31 As 3.
- 32 As 3.
- 33 Personal statement of Dr. Bernhard Frank on 29 July 1997 who, as a SS-Mann of the 2. SS-Standarte, was also asked by Himmler whether he wanted to become a high-ranking SS officer.
- 34 SS Personnel Examination List of 3 January 1935.
- 35 Gustav Lombard, 3 January 1935.
- 36 SS-Main Sector East to the Officer Candidate Course at Jüterbog

# With the SS-Verfügungstruppe: Officer Candidate Course in Jüterbog, 6 January to 24 April 1935

- Paul Albert Kausch on 24 January 1997; Harald von Saucken on 9 December 1996.
- 2 Harald von Saucken on 9 December 1996.
- 3 Paul Hüttig, personal statement on 14 November 1996.
- 4 As 4, as 2.

- 5 Kausch on 24 January 1997; personal statement on 5 November 1997
- 6 Hüttig, personal statement on 25 December 1996.
- 7 Kausch, November 1995; personal statement on 5 November 1997.
- 8 Hüttig, 28 November 1996; Kausch, personal statement on 18 December 1995.
- 9 Kausch, von Saucken, Hüttig.
- 10 RFSS Personnel Files, 13 June 1938. Basic training of officer candidates for 1 October 1938 (Bundesarchiv NS 17/101).
- 11 Kausch, Gerullis, Hüttig.
- 12 As 2.
- 13 Curriculum vitae of 14 January 1935.
- 14 Personnel filess of Jochen Peiper.
- 15 Kausch November 1995 and 24 January 1997; personal statement on 5 November 1997.
- Peiper was a SS-Oberscharführer in the Allgemeine SS, as he had been designated a SS Officer Candidate in the final evaluation at the officer candidate course for 7 April 935.
- 17 See 2.
- 18 See 14.
- 19 Consecutive No. 360 from 4 April 1935.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 As 6, along with Jüterboger, "Hitlers poltische Soldaten" and Bernd Wegner (p. 157).

## At the Braunschweig SS-Officer Academy: 24 April 1935 to 30 March 1936

- 1 "Soldaten wie andere auch" by Paul Hausser.
- 2 Otto Baum on 28 January 1996.
- 3 Hans Bollert on 8 February 1996.
- 4 Otto Baum on 8 February 1996.
- 5 Karl Sattler on 28 February 1996.
- 6 Karl Sattler on 14 February 1996.
- See 2. In the personnel file of Schulze (-Kossens) 1 April 1935 was given as the promotion date. The promotion to SS Cadet is not mentioned in Peiper's file.
- 8 Curriculum vitae of 1937.
- 9 11 July 1935.
- 10 Paul Albert Kausch, November 1995.
- 11 Personnel roster.
- 12 Otto Baum on 30 March 1996.
- 13 "Hitlers poltische Soldaten" by Bernd Wegner, Part 3.
- 14 Peiper on 9 April 1976 to Weingartner.
- 15 Personnel file of Jochen Peiper.
- 16 See 12.
- 17 Report III./LAH of 11 April 1936.
- 18 See 2.
- 19 Dienstalterliste 1938, 1944.

### In the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler: 1 April 1936 to 4 July 1938

- 1 Gerhard Julius on 3 July 1995 and Günter Hüttig in September 1995, both of whom only knew Peiper as a SS-Untersturmführer.
- 2 Karl Hollander on 4 June 1995.
- 3 Hermann Stahr on 5 July 995.
- 4 Hollander on 21 January 1996.
- 5 Personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995; Karl Hollander on 28 June 1995.
- 6 Wilhelm Schröer on 2 August 1995.
- 7 Personal statement of Heinrich Heiermann in August 1995.
- 8 Karl Hollander on 21 January 1996.

- 9 See 6.
- 10 Karl Hollander on 27 March 1996.
- 11 See 11; Rudi Feddern on 10 September 1995.
- 12 See 10.
- 13 Heinrich Heiermann on 16 August 1996.
- 14 "Hitlers poltische Soldaten" by B. Wegner.
- 15 As 7.
- 16 Hollander on 24 September 1995 and 21 January 1996.
- 17 See 4.
- 18 Karl Hollander during 4-28 June 1995.
- 19 Karl Hollander on 28 June 1995.
- 20 Jochen Peiper on 28 September 1936.
- 21 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 22 See 2.
- 23 See 4.
- 24 Gerhard Julius on 23 July 1995; Hollander on 24 September 1995.
- 25 Gerhard Julius on 3 July 1995.
- 26 See 13.
- 27 See 4.
- 28 Karl Hollander on 24 February 1991.
- 29 Personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 30 Alfred Roßdeutscher on 22 March 1996.
- 31 See 7.
- 32 Rudolf Feddern on 26 August 1995.
- 33 Performance Book for the Candidates for the Rider's Badge of the Reich Group for Breeding and Pedigrees.
- 34 Peiper on 8 August 1937 in the questionnaire for amendment to the Dienstalterliste.
- 35 See 2.
- 36 See 7.
- 37 Ernst W. Hilgemann on 28 July and 5 August 1995.
- 38 Recommendation for Promotion on 20 September 1942.
- 39 E. W. Hilgemann on 28 July 1995.

## On the Staff of the Reichsführer SS: 4 July 1938 to 18 May 1940

- 1 SS-Personnel Office, 4.7.1938.
- 2 "Nobility in the German Officer Corps," a statistical summary.
- 3 Contributing Members of the SS, Volume 7/34.
- 4 Himmler at the Officers Convention for the SS Main Sector Southeast in Breslau on 19 January 1935.
- 5 NAT 175, 90, 2447.
- 6 Bundesarchiv NS 16.
- 7 Personnel Files of Jochen Peiper.
- 8 See 7.
- 9 "Himmlers Burg" by Stuart Russell.
- 10 Karl Wolff; interrogation in 1947.
- 11 Dr. Bernhard Frank 9 and 22 February 1996; personal statement on 29 July 1997.
- 12 Dr. Bernhard Frank personal statement on 25 February 1996.
- 13 Dr. Bernhard Frank, personal statement on 29 July 1997.
- 14 MA 778.
- 15 Werner Grothmann.
- 16 Booklet for Contributing Members of the SS.
- 17 Promotion recommendation of 20 September 1942.
- 18 RFSS: Personnel Office, 19 October 1938.
- 19 "Der Adjutant Karl Wolff" by Jochen von Lang.
- 20 "Meine Danziger Mission" by Carl Burckhardt.
- 21 Otto Dinse, personal statement on 30 April 1995
- 22 Personal information provided by Gudrun B., Heinrich Himmler's

- daughter, on 20 February 1996 and 18 March 1998, which, in part, is based on testimony from her father's brother.
- 23 SS Personnel Office, 24 January 1939.
- 24 LSSAH P/Kr AZ 16 of 17 January 1939.
- 25 SS-Dienstalterliste of 1 December 1938.
- 26 Peiper's daughter, Elke Maierl, on 8 January 1982.
- 27 Sigurd Peiper's curriculum vitae in SS Personnel Files.
- 28 Peiper's Marriage Application of March 1939.
- 29 Dr. Arndt Fischer, personal statement on 19 February 1996.
- 30 Assessment by the Unit Leader of 11 March 1939.
- 31 Telegram of congratulation from SS-Gruppenführer Schmidt of 29 June 1939.
- 32 District Office Wilmersdorf, 23 July 1996.
- 33 MA 778, Diary A.
- 34 See 7. The official letter of appointment wasn't filled out until 14 November 1940.
- 35 Promotion recommendation of 20 September 1942.
- 36 See 7, as well as all SS-Dienstalterlisten.
- 37 As 35.
- 38 See 7.
- 39 WASt, 22 May 1996.
- 40 See 7.
- 41 Peiper's interrogation on 17 April 1947 (IfZ 948/56).
- 42 See 19.
- 43 See 41.
- 44 See 19.
- 45 See 41.
- 46 See 41.
- 47 See 13.
- 48 Diary A of 1 June 1939.
- 49 MA 778.
- 50 W. Gärtner from Rome on 2 May 1940.
- 51 Undated nine page report in the MA.

#### Campaign In France: 18 May to 21 June 1940

- 1 Heinz Motz on 2 August 1995.
- 2 Personal statement of Rudolf Feddern on 19 September 1996; Motz confirmed that Peiper was a platoon leader for only 2 or 3 days on 2 August 1995.
- 3 "Die Leibstandarte" by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 4 Personnel Files on Peiper.
- 5 Personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 6 See 4.
- 7 See 4.
- 8 See 5.
- 9 See 4.

# Return to the Staff of the Reichsführer SS: 21 June 1940 to 4 August 1941

- 1 Werner Grothmann on 4 July 1995.
- 2 Werner Grothmann on 23 June 1995.
- 3 Leon Degrelle.
- 4 Promotion recommendation of 20 September 1942.
- 5 See 1.
- 6 "Kameraden aus dem Norden" ("Comrades from the North") in "Das Schwarze Korps."
- 7 Personal statement of Dr. Bernhard Frank on 29 July 1997.
- 8 Personnel files of Lie: Iron Cross list for the I./LAH.
- 9 Peiper's interrogation on 17 April 1947 (IfZ 948/56).
- 10 WASt on 4 February 1997.

- 11 Leo Wilm on 3 July 1995.
- 12 Leo Wilm on 28 August 1995.
- 13 Alfred Roßdeutscher on 23 March 1996.
- 14 See 13.
- 15 Compare procedures for others accused of violations of paragraph 175 (homosexuality); see various personnel files.
- 16 Alfred Roßdeutscher on 5 April 1996.
- 17 Personal statement of Günther Hüttig on 12 December 1996.
- 18 Sec 16
- 19 Personnel files of Peiper.
- 20 Helmut Weber on 23 January 1996.
- 21 Diary of Günther Borcher; Helmut Weber on 3 January 1996.
- 22 Zehlendorf District Office on 4 September 1996.
- 23 WASt on 22 May 1996.
- 24 Special appendix to the Verordnungsblatt der Waffen-SS, No. 2, of 15 January 1943.
- 25 Rudolf von Ribbentrop on 4 October 1995.
- 26 IfZ MA 778.
- 27 As 2.
- 28 Personal statement of Otto Dinse on 27 February 1996.
- 29 Werner Grothmann.

#### Peiper on the Eastern Front: 4 August 1941 to 11 July 1942

- 1 Heinz Meier on 19 April 1995. In September 1941, he was an orderly officer for the III./LAH. He can't imagine Peiper on the staff of the III./LAH and didn't see him there.
- 2 Personnel files of Lehmann.
- 3 Albert Frey on 2 December 1990.
- 4 Heinz Meier on 29 July 1995.
- 5 "Ich wollte die Freiheit" by Albert Frey.
- 6 Heinz Meier on 19 April and 29 July 1995.
- 7 See 5.
- 8 Bundesarchiv.
- 9 See 5.
- 10 "Die Leibstandarte" by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 11 See 5.
- 12 Personal statement of Paul Dienemann on 4 December 1997. He was there as a Rottenführer and received the Iron Cross, 1st Class.
- 13 Heinz Meier on 12 June 1995.
- 14 See 10.
- 15 See 5.
- 16 Dr. Kurt Sickel on 30 January 1945.
- 17 Personnel files on Peiper.
- 18 Albert Frey in 1996.
- 19 Weißensee District Office on 27 August 1996.
- 20 Patient's file unavailable according to the administrative director of the clinic on 12 September and 4 November 1996.
- 21 Zehlendorf District Office on 4 September 1996.

#### Peiper Becomes the Commander of the III. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 LSSAH

- 1 Personnel files on Peiper.
- 2 Entry in the war diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- 3 Personal statement of the adjutant at the time, Otto Dinse, on 29 May 1996; Günter Gaul on 7 December 1996.
- 4 Günter Gaul on 29 March 1991.
- 5 Erich Schöbel on 4 October 1996.
- 6 See 5.
- 7 See 1.
- 8 Teletype from the SS-PHA on 18 January 1943.

- 9 Personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 10 Personal statement of Otto Dinse.
- 11 War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- 12 Dr. Franz Neuendorf on 10 November 1990.
- 13 SS-FHA geh Kdos of 24 November 1942.
- 14 Teletype of 5 January 1943; war diary. On this day, the 14./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 was officially inactivated.
- 15 Günther Wagner on 13 June 1995.
- 16 Günter Gaul on 7 December 1996.
- 17 "Errinerungen eines Soldaten" by Heinz Guderian.
- 18 "Halbkettenfahrzeuge des deutschen Heeres," published by Motorbuch-Verlag.
- 19 Kuno Balz on 29March 1995.
- 20 Gustav Becker on 13 May 1996, Martin Säuberlich on 30 September 1996 and Günter Gaul on 7 December 1996.
- 21 Martin Säuberlich on 30 June 1996.
- 22 Gustav Becker on 13 May 1996, Balz on 29 March 1995, and Günter Gaul on 30 May 1997.
- 23 As 19.
- 24 Martin Säuberlich on 10 April 1995.
- 25 Unit newsletter of the 13./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 in
- 26 See 15.
- 27 Johannes Bräuer on 16 June 1995.
- 28 See 15
- 29 Fritz Schmautz on 11 September 1995.
- 30 See 24.
- 31 See 9.
- 32 See 9.
- 33 Johannes Bräuer on 8 December 1991.
- 34 Erich Schöbel on 27 April 1990.
- 35 Erich Schöbel on 1 February 1994.
- 36 Erich Schöbel on 9 November 1990.
- 37 Johannes Bräuer on 8 December 1990.
- 38 Dr. Franz Neuendorff on 18 October 1990.
- 39 See 12.
- 40 Günter Gaul on 6 September 1995.
- 41 See 1.
- 42 Personnel Files on Woldemar Peiper.
- 43 Personal statement of Dr. Franz Neuendorff on 26 October 1996.
- 44 See 1.
- 45 As 43.
- 46 Diary of Erhard Gührs.
- 47 War diary.
- 48 See 46.
- 49 See 46.
- 50 See 46.

#### In Action at Kharkov: 27 January to 29 March 1943

- 1 Diary of Heinrich Glenewinkel, at the time SS-Sturmmann in the 13. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 2 Diary of Erhard Gührs, at the time SS-Untersturmführer in the 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 3 See 3.
- 4 Kuno Balz on 19 April 1995.
- 5 See 2
- 6 See 1.
- 7 Johannes Bräuer on 16 June 1995.

- 8 See 3.
- 9 War diary of I./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 10 War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 11 See 9.
- 12 See 1.
- 13 See 10.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Heinz Freyer, personal information provided on 1 September 1995.
- 18 Ibid. Paul Guhl, personal information provided on 1 July 1995.
- 19 See 7.
- 20 See 9.
- 21 See 2.
- 22 See 10.
- 23 See 2.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Peiper on 26 February 1943.
- 26 See 2.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 See 10.
- 29 Personal information provided by Erhard Gührs.
- 30 See 10.
- 31 Jochen Peiper on 10 April 1976 in "Die Leibstandarte," volume III, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 32 Personal statement by Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 33 Rudolf von Ribbentrop on 4 October 1995.
- 34 See 25.
- 35 See 2.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 See 32.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Günther Wagner on 13 June 1995.
- 41 See 10.
- 42 See 2.
- 43 Confirmed close combat day for SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 as given in a regimental order on 12 April 1943.
- 44 See 40.
- 45 Peiper to Prof. James Weingartner around 1969.
- 46 Erich Schöbel on 8 March 1994.
- 47 See 2.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 See 10.
- 50 See 2.
- 51 Kuno Balz on 22 March 1996.
- 52 See 1.
- 53 See 32.
- 54 See 10.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 See 2.
- 57 Werner Kindler.
- 58 See 25.
- 59 See 2.
- 60 See 10.
- 61 See 2.

- 62 See 40.
- 63 Kuno Balz on 29 March 1995.
- 64 See 2.
- 65 See 43.
- 66 Otto Dinse.
- 67 See 10.
- 68 See 2.
- 69 See 1.
- 70 See 2.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Ernst Gaschnitz on 23 July 1943.
- 73 See 9.
- 74 See 43.
- 75 Peiper in his recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Paul Guhl on 26 August 1943.
- 76 See 10.
- 77 See 29.
- 78 See 2.
- 79 "Meine Ehre heißt Treue" by Oswald Siegmund.
- 80 See 10.
- 81 See 2.
- 82 Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Peiper on 7 March 1943.
- 83 See 75.
- 84 See 10.
- 85 "Die Leibstandarte," Volume III, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 86 Dr. Dr. Günter Hollatz on 12 February 1997.
- 87 See 10.
- 88 See 75.
- 89 Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Rudolf Sandig on 1 April 1943.
- 90 See 43.
- 91 Personal statement of Otto Dinse on 30 April 1994; "Der Sekretär" by Jochen von Lang.
- 92 Personal statement of Fritz Thier on 3 June 1996.
- 93 Telegram from the Reichsführer SS to Peiper on 9 March 1943 in the personnel files on Peiper.
- 94 "Das Schwarze Korps" on 15 April 1943.
- 95 See 10.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Recommendation for award of the Iron Cross, 1st Class to Paul Guhl.
- 99 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Karl-Heinz Prinz in 1943.
- 100 Divisional order No. 8, 10 March 1943.
- 101 See 10.
- 102 Hans Siegel in "Der Freiwillige," No. 7/8 in 1994.
- 103 See 89.
- 104 See 102.
- 105 See 1.
- 106 Martin Säuberlich on 30 September 1996.
- 107 See 85.
- 108 See 10.
- 109 See 102.
- 110 Martin Säuberlich on 11 February 1996.
- 111 Martin Säuberlich on 23 February 1996.
- 112 See 110.

- 113 See 17.
- 114 See 2.
- 115 See 10.
- 116 See 79.
- 117 See 107
- 118 See 10.

119 "Völkischer Beobachter".

#### The Capture of Belgorod on 18 March 1943

- 1 War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.Copy in author's possession.
- Confirmed close combat day of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 as given in regimental orders dated 12 April 1943.
- Personal statement of Erhard Gührs.
- "Die Leibstandarte," Volume III, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- See 1. 5
- 6 See 3.
- 7 See 1.
- 8 Personal statement of Otto Dinse on 1 May 1996.
- Peiper in his recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Paul Guhl on 26 August 1943.
- "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte. 10
- 11 Werner Kindler.
- 12 See 1.
- 13 Ibid..
- 14 Fritz Thier on 3 May 1996.
- 15 Rudolf von Ribbentrop on 4 October 1995.
- 16 See 1
- 17 Werner Kindler.
- See 1. 18
- 19 "Trier Nationalblatt".
- 20 See 2.

#### Rest, Refitting and Training: 29 March to 4 July 1943

- War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 2 Personal statement of Erhard Gührs.
- 3 Decorations roster of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- Personal statements of Karl Menne and Erich Straßgschwandtner.
- 5 Special regimental order dated 19 April 1943.
- 6 See 2.
- 7 Regimental Order No. 25 dated 28 April 1943.
- 8 Personal statement of Otto Dinse on 6 July 1995.
- 9 OKH file cards of those awarded the German Cross in Gold.
- 10 Regimental Order No. 28 dated 13 May 1943.
- 11 Special Order No. 13 dated 24 May 1943.
- 12 Personnel Directive No. 17 dated 24 June 1943.
- 13 Regimental Order No. 37 dated 15 June 1943.
- 14 Personal statement of Bernd von Bergmann on 22 May 1997.
- 15 Special Order No. 16.
- 16 See 1.
- 17 See 2.
- 18 See 1.
- 19 Hellmuth Franke on 26 June 1995.
- 20 Personnel files on Stamm and "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 21 Order.
- 22 Personal statement of Werner Kindler on 3 September 1995.
- 23 See 2.
- 24 Ibid.

#### Operation 'Citadel', the Kursk Offensive: 4 to 17 July 1943

- 1 Diary of Erhard Gührs, at the time SS-Untersturmführer commanding the 14. (gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 2 Ibid.

#### Plans and Preparations for the "Citadel" Offensive: 4 to 17 July 1943

- "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" Patrick Agte.
- 4 Ibid.
- "Gesetz des Handelns Operation Zitadelle" by Dr. Ernst Klink.
- 6 Diary of Erhard Gührs. Copy in author's possession.

#### Beginning of the "Citadel" Offensive

- War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- Diary of Erhard Gührs. Copy in author's possession.
- Peiper in his recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Heinz Kling on 5 December 1943.
- See 9. 11
- 12 Ibid.
- Rolf Ehrhardt in "Die Leibstandarte," Volume III, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 14 See 8 and 9.
- 15 War diary of II. SS-Panzer-Korps.
- 16 See 9.
- 17 See 10.
- Peiper in his recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Paul Guhl on 26 August 1943.
- 19 See 9.
- 20 Hugo Kraas in July 1943.
- 21 Personal statement of Bernd von Bergmann on 22 May 1997.
- 22 Personal statement of Werner Kindler on 2 July 1995.
- 23 Adam Rensch on 15 April 1996.
- 24 Hellmuth Franke on 26 June 1995.
- Personal statement of Werner Kindler on 5 July 1995.
- 26 Confirmed close combat day for SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- 27 See 10.
- 28 Erich Schöbel on 7 May 1996.
- 29 Dr. Herbert Schramm: manuscript for his article "Der 7. Tag" ("The 7th Day") in "das Schwarze Korps" (1944).
- 30 Personal statement of Erhard Gührs.
- 31 Personal statement of Werner Kindler on 3 September 1996.
- 32 See 9.
- Johannes Brauer on 8 December 1996.
- 34 Johannes Bräuer on 16 June 1995.
- 35 Personal statements of Kurt Butenhoff and Werner Kindler on 30 April 1998.
- 36 Peiper in his recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Werner Wolff on 27 March 1943.
- "Ich wollte die Frieheit" by Albert Frey.
- 38 Erhart Knöfel on 14 June 1991.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Diary of Heinz Glenewinkel. Copy in author's possession.
- See 18.
- 42 See 29.
- 43 Rudolf von Ribbentrop.
- Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to von Ribbentrop dated 13 July 1943, after the decision was made on the Knight's Cross.
- 45 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Walter

- Malchow on 13 July 1943.
- 46 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Hans Siptrott on 20 October 1944; Recommendation for Theodore Jensen to be named in the German Army's Roll of Honor on 2 November 1944.
- 47 See 37.
- 48 Pz AOK 4, IC 500/43 geh., dated 24 April 1943.
- 49 "Gesetz des Handelns Operation Zitadelle" by Dr. Ernst Klink.
- 50 See 8.
- 51 See 9.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 See 26.
- 54 See 9.
- 55 Ibid.

#### The Leibstandarte in Italy: 5 August to 24 October 1943

- 1 Diary of Erhard Gührs. Copy in author's possession.
- 2 Personal statement of Erhard Gührs on 20 July 1997.
- 3 Werner Kindler.
- 4 War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 5 Personal statement of Fritz Their.
- 6 Werner Wolff on 28 and 30 August 1943.
- 7 Decorations roster for SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- 8 Close Combat Day in the pay book of Paul Zwigart.
- 9 Personnel files on Peiper.
- 10 Regimental Order No. 51 dated 30 August 1943.
- 11 Corps headquarters, II. SS-Panzer-Korps, 9 July 1943.
- 12 Personal statement of Helmut Mück concerning a conversation with Werner Wolff on 31 May 1997.
- 3 Personal statement of Walter Braasch in 1995. Braasch went to officer candidate school in the fall of 1944.
- 14 Special Regimental Order No. 31 dated 31 August 1943.
- 15 Regimental Order No. 53 dated 3 September 1943 and personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 16 "Die Leibstandarte," Volume III, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 17 Personal statement of Otto Dinse on 30 April 1996.
- 18 Decision of I Stuttgart District Court, Major Crimes Division, on 23 December 1968 (I AR pp. 62-68).
- 19 Personal statement of Kurt Butenhoff on 29 April 1995 and 30 April 1996.
- 20 Erhard Gührs in 1998.
- 21 Peiper in "Die Leibstandarte," Volume III, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 See 18.
- 24 bid.
- 25 Erhard Gührs on 8 May 1997.
- 26 See 21.
- 27 See 17.
- 28 See 16.
- 29 See 4.
- 30 See 25.
- 31 See 4.
- 32 Erhard Gührs on 10 July 1997.

## The Third Time on the Eastern Front: 15 November 1943 to 1 February 1944

- 1 Hans Jürgen Larsen on 14 September 1995.
- 2 Erhard Gührs.
- 3 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Konrad Heubeck dated 2 May 1944; Recommendation for award

- of the German Cross in Gold to Hans Stübing dated 31 January 1944.
- 4 Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Herbert Kuhlmann dated 31 January 1944.
- 5 War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 6 Peiper in his recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Heinz Kling dated 5 December 1943.
- 7 See 5
- 8 Decorations Roster of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division LSSAH.

#### Peiper Takes Over the Panzer-Regiment

- I Peiper on 7 April 1973.
- 2 Personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 3 Walter Lehn on 24 October 1995.
- 4 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 12 February 1998 and personal statement on 19 February 1996.
- 5 Personal statement of Helmut Mück on 31 May 1997.
- 6 Walter Malchow; See 5.
- 7 Personal statement of Albert Frey on 16 February 1996 and Heinz Meier in 199?.
- 8 Personal statements of Adalbert Wichmann on 20 March 1996 and Rolf Ehrhardt in 1993.
- 9 Herbert Reinecker in "Das Schwarze Korps".
- 10 Fritz Kosmehl on 9 January 1996.
- 11 Hubert Heil.
- 12 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Peiper in his recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Heinz Kling on 5 December 1943.
- 15 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Paul Guhl dated 6 August 1943.
- 16 Erhard Gührs on 29 May 1997 and personal statement on 20 July 1997.
- 17 Peiper to Prof. James Weingartner around 1969.
- 18 Personal statements of Otto Dinse and Werner Kindler on 30 April 1994, 29 April 1995 and 31 May 1996.
- 19 See 2.
- 20 Personal statement of Erhard Gührs on 20 July 1997.
- 21 Personnel files.
- 22 Werner Wolff on 30 November 1943.
- 23 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Hans Siptrott dated 20 October 1944.
- 24 Personal statement of Fritz zu Klampen on 1 June 1997.
- 25 Chronicle of the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 26 Personal statement of Fritz zu Klampen on 25 September 1995 and 17 July 1997.
- 27 See 10.
- 28 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH," by Patrick Agte.
- 29 Erhard Gührs on 8 May 1997.
- 30 Willy Micheluzzi on 21 September 1995.
- 31 Personal statement of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 19 February 1996.
- 32 Bernhard Hasenknopf in the Chronicle of SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 and Kurt Imhoff.
- 33 Adalbert Wichmann on 23 December 1993 and 16 March 1996.
- 34 Erhard Gührs and 10 July 1996 and personal statements.
- 35 Personal statement of Erhard Gührs on 20 July 1997.
- 36 Hans Röwer on 20 August 1989.
- 37 Report from the Health and Fitness-For-Duty Testing Center for the Waffen-SS from 11/12 February 1944.
- 38 See 2.

- 39 "Die Leibstandarte," Volume III, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 40 Helmut Mück on 15 October 1995.
- 41 Wilhelm Nußhag on 18 September 1995.
- 42 Fritz zu Klampen on 28 July 1996.
- 43 Willy Micheluzzi.
- 44 See 40.
- 45 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 17 November 1995.
- 46 War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 47 See 15.
- 48 See 14.
- 49 See 2.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid
- 52 Erhard Gührs on 10 July 1997.
- 53 Recommendation for promotion dated 28 November 1943 in the personnel files on Peiper.
- 54 Fritz Kosmehl on 14 July 1996.
- 55 See 2.
- 56 See 31.
- 57 See 40.
- 58 See 39.
- 59 Werner Kindler.
- 60 Edmund Martin.
- 61 Hugo Kraas.

#### Operation "Advent" and the Fighting up to January 1944

- 1 Dr. Karl Zumpe on 19 February 1996.
- 2 Entry in Heinz Kling's Photo Album and "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 3 Walter Kettl on 19 June 1996.
- 4 War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 5 Recommendation for award of the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross to Peiper dated 27 December 1943.
- 6 Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Paul Guhl and personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 7 Erhard Gührs on 7 September 1995.
- 8 See 5
- 9 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 10 "Die Leibstandarte," Volume III, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 11 See 4.
- 12 See 5.
- 13 Helmut Mück on 15 October 1995 and personal statement on 31 May 1997.
- 14 Erhard Gührs on 8 May 1997.
- 15 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Ernst Otto dated 10 November 1944.
- 16 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Hans Stübing dated 31 January 1944.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Hans Oeser: tape recording on 10 December 1997.
- 19 Walter Kühn on 22 January 1998; Casualty list of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 20 Casualty list of SS-Panzer-Regiment 12.
- 21 Paul Kurbjuhn: "Die eisernen Särge" ("The Iron Coffins") in "Das Schwarze Korps".
- 22 Rolf Reiser on 29 May 1998.
- 23 See 9.
- 24 Ibid.

- 25 See 4.
- 26 Edmund Martin on 10 December 1943.
- 27 See 4.
- 28 Personal statement of Fritz zu Klampen on 1 June 1997.
- 29 Gerd Jahn on 8 April 1996.
- 30 See 4. "Hof Wadjaleff" appears here instead of Badjalowka.
- 31 Hugo Kraas on 12 December 1943.
- 32 See 10.
- 33 Fritz Kosmehl on 9 January 1996.
- 34 See 20.
- 35 Walter Malchow on 25 April 1989.
- 36 Corps Order No. 14.
- 37 "Panzerschlachten" ("Panzer Battles") by Friedrich W. von Mellenthin, Neckargemünd, 1963.
- 38 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichnungen in den Divisionen des I. SS-Panzer-Korps," unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 39 Helmut Wendorff: undated written communication to Wittmann around 18 December 1943.
- 40 Personal statement of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 19 February 1996.
- 41 See 18.
- 42 See 4.
- 43 See21.
- 44 See 40.
- 45 See 18.
- 46 Werner Kindler.
- 47 See 4.
- 48 Ibid..
- 49 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 9 May 1998 and personal statement on 19 February 1996; Horst Schumann on 20 December 1995.
- 50 See 40.
- 51 Walter Malchow on 5 April 1989.
- 52 See 18.
- 53 See 20.
- 54 Erhard Gührs on 8 May 1997 and 7 September 1995 as well as his diary.
- 55 Werner Kindler on 29 April 1995.
- 56 Report of the Intelligence Officer of the LAH to the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps on 20 December 1943.
- 57 See 10 and 40.
- 58 Statements from various officers of the I./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 to the author in 1990, 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Personal statement of SS-Standartenführer and Commander of the SS-Panzer-Regiment 11, Paul-Albert Krausch, Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross, on 14 November 1997.
- 61 See 4.
- 62 Walter Malchow on 5 pril 1989.
- 63 Pay Book Entry of Fischer and personal statement of Adalbert Wichmann.
- 64 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Hans Malkomes dated 2 May 1944.
- 65 Edmund Martin: letter from the field dated 23 December 1943.
- 66 Fritz Kosmehl on 9 November 1996.
- 67 Gert Quarthammer: letter from the field dated 20 September 1943.
- 68 See 37.
- 69 See 21.
- 70 Erich Straßgschwandtner on 29 April 1995 and award roster for the Tank Destruction Badge for SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 dated 26 May 1944.
- 71 See 64.

- 72 Edmund Martin, personal memories of his service as radio operator in the 3./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, unpublished manuscript, copy in author's possession.
- 73 Peiper in Recommendation for Award of the Knight's Cross to Helmut Wendorff dated 13 January 1944.
- 74 Recommendation for Award of Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross to Hugo Kraas dated 3 January 1944.
- 75 See 73.
- 76 See 74.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 See 73.
- 79 See 74.
- 80 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichnungen in den Divisionen des I. SS-Panzerkorps," unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 81 Letter from Helmut Wendorff to Wittmann on 23 February 1944.
- 82 Walter Robock to Edmund Martin on 24 April 1985.
- 83 See 72.
- 84 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Walter Graul which was refused 1944.
- 85 See 20.
- 86 Michael Wittmann: letter from the field dated 14 December 1944.
- 87 Adalbert Wichmann on 22 March 1995.
- 88 See 64.
- 89 Adalbert Wichmann on 3 January 1994 and 3 September 1995.
- 90 Chronicle of SS-Flak-Bataillon 1, "Gefahrten unserer Jugend."
- 91 See 64.
- 92 Adalbert Wichmann on 3 January 1994 and 16 March 1996.
- 93 See 10.
- 94 Erhard Gührs on 8 and 29 May 1997.
- 95 Confirmed tank battle day for the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 96 See 72.
- 97 Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Michael Wittmann dated 10 January 1944. See also 9.
- 98 See 4.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 See 97.
- 101 August Galle, SS war correspondent.
- 102 See 9.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Awards list.
- 106 See 72.
- 107 Peiper in Recommendation for Award of the Knight's Cross to Heinz Kling dated 17 January 1944.
- 108 Iron Cross Documents of Rößner: See document section as well as photo documentation. See also 9.
- 109 See 9.
- 110 Michael Wittmann: letter from the field dated 14 December 1943.
- 111 Helmut Mück on 15 October 1995.

#### Operation Watutin: January 1944

- Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Hans Dauser and Herbert Kuhlmann.
- 2 Confirmed close combat day for SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- 3 Horst Schumann on 20 December 1995.
- 4 Michael Wittmann: letter from the field dated 29 January 1944.
- 5 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 6 See 2
- 7 Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Herbert Kuhlmann dated 31 January 1944.

- 8 Michael Wittmann: letter from the field on 29 January 1944.
- 9 Award roster.
- 10 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 19 February 1996.
- 11 Gert Quarthammer: letter from the field on 10 October 1944.

#### The Oak Leaves for Peiper

- 1 Personal statement on Hinrich Peiper on 14 May 1998 and 12 June 1998; personal statement of Werner Grothmann, Adjutant to the Reichsführer SS, on 13 May 1998; and, personal statement of Gudrun B., daughter of the Reichsführer SS, on 18 March 1998.
- 2 Report from the Health and Fitness-For-Duty Testing Center for the Waffen-SS on 11/12 February 1944.
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Jochen Peiper: uncompleted manuscript, 1975/76.

## SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Action Without Peiper: February to April 1944

- Letter from Helmut Wendorff to Wittmann dated 23 February 1944.
- 2 Personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 3 Gert Quarthammer: letter from the field dated 21 October 1944.
- 4 War diary of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2. Copy in author's possession.
- 5 Personal statement of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 19 February 1996.
- 6 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 7 Erhard Gührs.
- 8 See 5.
- 9 Personal statement of Erich Straßgschwandtner on 29 May 1995.
- 10 Personal statements of Bernd von Bergmann on 29 April 1995 and 22 May 1997.
- 11 Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Werner Poetschke dated 24 April 1944.

# Reorganization of the Panzer Regiment in Flanders: April to June 1944

- 1 Jochen Peiper: uncompleted manuscript, 1975/1976.
- Werner Hentschel on 18 May 1998 and 4 June 1998; Organizational Position Listing for SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 dated 15 May 1944.
- 3 Heinz Hänze on 11 April 1996.
- 4 Dr. Paul Zumpe on 28 February 1996.
- 5 Edmund Martin on 22 May 1944.
- 6 Personal statements of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996 and 30 November 1997.
- 7 Rolf Reiser, 30.11.1997.
- 8 Organizational Position Listing of 12 June and 13 July 1944; personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 9 Organizational Position Listing of 15 May 1944.
- 10 Communications from different former members of the Headquarters Company, documented with photos.
- 11 Fritz zu Klampen.
- 12 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 12 February 1998.
- 13 Gerhard Stiller: unpublished manuscript concerning his service in Normandy. Copy in author's possession.
- 14 Gerhard Stiller on 11 July 1994.
- 15 Helga Wolff on 30 September 1994.
- 16 Heinrich Kahlen on 23 February 1984.
- 17 Divisional Files.
- 18 Organizational Position Listing of 13 July 1944.

- 19 Organizational Position Listing of 13 June 1944.
- 20 Dr. Karl Zumpe on 28 February 1996.
- 21 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 22 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 9 May 1998.
- 23 Edmund Martin on 8 August 1996.
- 24 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 25 Gerd Jahn 11 November 1996; Dr. Arndt Fischer on 9 May 1998.
- 26 Dr. Ernst Reicher on 16 June 1996.
- 27 Organizational Position Listing; Gerhard Stiller; and, various communications with the author.
- 28 Organizational Position Listing of 20 May 1944.
- 29 Personal statement of Rudolf von Ribbentrop on 1 October 1995.
- 30 Divisional Files.
- 31 Pay Books and divisional files.
- 32 Gerhard Stiller on 25 March 1994.
- 33 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Hans Malkomes dated 2 May 1944.
- 34 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Konrad Heubeck dated 2 May 1944.
- 35 Herbert Poetschke on 11 April 1989.
- 36 Willy Micheluzzi on 30 August 1995.
- 37 Personal statement of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 19 February 1996.

#### Invasion: In Action at the Scheldt Estuary: 6 to 17 June 1944

- 1 "Kriegsgeschichte der 12. SS-Panzerdivision "Hitlerjugend" by Hubert Meyer and other literature dealing with the invasion.
- 2 Edmund Martin: letter from the field dated 7 June 1944.
- 3 Regimental Order for SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 dated 9 June 1944.
- 4 Gerhard Stiller: unpublished manuscript concerning his actions as SS-Untersturmführer and platoon leader in the 7./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and commander of the 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Normandy in 1944. Copy in author's possession.
- 5 Helga Wolff on 15 January 1995.
- 6 Heinrich Kahlen on 23 February 1985.
- 7 See 5
- 8 Helga Wolff on 29 August 1994.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Helga Wolff on 4 January 1996.
- 11 Recommendation for inclusion in the German Army's Roll of Honor for Sepp Armberger by Generalleutnant Püchler dated 16 April 1944.
- 12 Heinz Hänze.
- 13 Personal statement of Hermann Kahl on 28 January 1998.
- 14 Gerd Jahn on 11 November 1996 and Organizational Position Listing.
- 15 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 12 February 1998.
- 16 See 13.
- 17 See 15.
- 18 Dr. Ernst Reicher on 16 June 1996.
- 19 See 4.
- 20 See 15.
- 21 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 22 See 13.
- 23 See 4.
- 24 See 18.
- 25 Diary of Hans-Rudolf Brunkhorst, 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Copy in author's possession.
- 26 Heinz Hänze on 11 April 1996.
- 27 Dr. Karl Zumpe on 28 February 1996.

#### 28 See 4.

#### In Action in Normandy: 30 June to 20 August 1944

- 1 Edmund Martin on 30 June 1944.
- 2 Traugott Schmidt in the Frankfurt Allegemeine Zeitung on 13 January 1997.
- 3 Béatrice Poulle: "Cahiers de mémoire: Vivre et survivre pendant la Bataille de Normandie," Conseil général de Calvados, 1994.
- 4 Personal statements of Gerhard Manß and Werner Kindler,.
- 5 Personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 6 Personal statement of Werner Kindler on 29 April 1998.
- 7 Diary of Hans-Rudolf Brunkhorst, 5./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Copy in author's possession.
- 8 Recommendation for Award of Knight's Cross to Frank Hasse dated 15 July 1944.
- 9 Traugott Schmidt on 12 July 1944.
- 10 Gerhard Stiller: "Normandy," unpublished manuscript.
- 11 Casualty List of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- 12 Alois Pumberger on 10 March 1998.
- 13 Casualty list of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 14 Edmund Martin: letter from the field dated 14 July 1944.
- 15 See 7.
- 16 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann, with corrections by the author.
- 17 Heinz Hönze on 21 December 1982.
- 18 Heinz Hönze on 12 September 1995.

#### Operation "Goodwood": 18 to 29 July 1944

- Poetschke in his recommendation for Award of Knight's Cross to Hans Malkomes on 25 October 1944.
- 2 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 3 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 4 Recommendation for Award German Cross in Gold to Ernst Otto on 10 November 1944.
- 5 Dr. Ernst Reicher on 16 June 1996.
- 6 See 1.
- 7 "Fife and Forfar Yeomanry," by Sellar quoted in "The Leibstandarte", Volume IV/2, by Rudolf Lehmann.
- 8 Ken Tout on 1 August 1997.
- 9 Karl Rettlinger on 1 September 1944.
- 10 See 2
- 11 Casualty list of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 12 Günther Mollnau on 23 January 1998.
- 13 Diary of Hans-Rudolf Brunkhorst. Copy in author's possession.
- 14 Gerhard Stiller: "Normandy"
- 15 Werner Henschel on 4 June 1998 and personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 16 Personal statements of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 19 February 1996 and Hermann Kahl on 28 January 1997.
- 17 Rolf Reiser on 6 June 1998.
- 18 See 4.
- 19 Rolf Reiser: tape recording on 18 February 1996.
- 20 Willy Micheluzzi on 30 August 1995.
- 21 See 11.
- 22 See 13.
- 23 See 17.

#### Fighting South of Caen: 21 to 24 July 1944

- 1 "Victory in the West" by L. F. Ellis quoted in "The Leibstandarte" Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 2 Diary of Hans Brunkhorst. Copy in author's possession.
- 3 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.

- 4 Gerhard Stiller, unpublished manuscript concerning his actions. in Normandy, 1944. Copy in author's possession.
- 5 Personal statement by Gerhard Manß and casualty list of the SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 6 Erhard Gührs on 10 July 1997.
- 7 Alois Pumberger on 10 March 1998
- 8 Fritz Kosmehl on 9 January 1996.
- 9 Werner Henschel on 4 June 1998.

# The Canadian Operation "Spring" and the Fighting South of Caen: 25 July to 7 August 1944

- 1 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 2 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichtungen in den Divisionen des I SS-Panzerkorps," unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 3 Diary of Hans Brunkhorst. Copy in author's possession.
- 4 Gerhard Stiller: unpublished manuscript concerning his actions in Normandy in 1944. Copy in author's possession.
- 5 Personal statement of Willi Pluschke on 30 April 1995 and Werner Kindler on 29 April 1995.
- 6 Personal statement of Erhard Gührs on 20 July 1997.
- 7 Fritz Kosmehl 9 January 1996; Confirmation by SS-Hauptsturmführer Helmut Jahn of Kosmehl as opposed to Klampen.
- 8 See 3
- 9 Recommendation for Award of German Cross to Otto Schaelte dated 1 September 1944.
- 10 Michael Wittmann: letter from the field dated 17 March 1944.
- 11 Dr. Helmut Naumann on 17 March 1996.
- 12 See 4.
- 13 Heinrich Kahlen on 7 June 1990.
- 14 Helga Wolff on 30 May 1994 and Heinrich Kahlen on 17 July 1990.
- 15 See 13.
- 16 Recommendation for Award of German Cross in Gold to Hans Siptrott dated 20 October 1944.
- 17 Gerhard Stiller on 11 July 1994.
- 18 "La Campagne de la Victoire" by C. P. Stacy (Ottawa, 1966), quoted in "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/ Tiemann.
- 19 Gerhard Hoepp on 23 April 1985.
- 20 Erhard Gührs on 27 December 1997.
- 21 Fritz Kosmehl and Horst Schumann.
- 22 Dr. Kurt Sickel: itemization of Peiper's wounds (January 1945). Werner Hentschel on 14 June 1998.
- 23 WASt on 22 May 1996.
- 24 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichnungen in den Divisionen des I SS-Panzerkorps', unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 25 Ibid
- 26 Elmar Bonn and Knight's Cross Recommendation for Göstl dated 31 August 1944.
- 27 See 24.
- 28 Confirmed Panzer battle day for the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 29 See 3.
- 30 WASt on 22 May 1996 and Alois Brandmaier on 13 September 1944. Piper's presence after 13 October 1944 is attested by his signed recommendation for the Knight's Cross for Armberger.

# SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 in Operation "Lüttich" (without Peiper): 7 to 9 August 1944 / The Falaise Pocket and the Delay Across France: Through the End of August 1944.

1 SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der W-SS Fritz Kraemer on 17 November 1945 (Ethint 24).

- 2 Personal statements of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 19 February 1995 and 6 June 1998.
- 3 Casualty List.
- 4 Personnel File on Peiper.
- 5 See 3.
- 6 See 1.
- 7 Hermann Staritz on 30 October 1995.
- 8 Hermann Staritz on 14 October 1995; Casualty List of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- 9 Erhard Gührs on 27 December 1997.
- 10 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann. The 19-year old-Reinecken died on 23 August 1944 in Military Hospital 613.
- 11 See 3.
- 12 See 9.
- 13 Erhard Gührs on 8 May 1997 and personal statement on 20 July 1995.
- 14 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 15 See 3.
- 16 Dr. Karl Zumpe on 28 February 1996.
- 17 Jochen Peiper on 13 November 1944.
- 18 Confirmed Panzer battle day for the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 19 See 1.
- 20 Recommendation for award of the Knight's Cross to Sepp Armberger dated 13 October 1944.
- 21 Hans Hillig on 24 November 1981; Personal statements from various former members of the Headquarters Co of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 on 30 May 1996 and 31 May 1997.
- 22 Fritz Kosmehl on 9 January 1996.
- 23 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 24 See 22 and personnel files on Kuhlmann.
- 25 See 22.
- 26 Gerhard Nüske in 1994.
- 27 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 28 Personal statements of Otto Dinse on 30 April 1995 and Werner Kindler on 29 April 1996.
- 29 See 3.
- 30 Personnel file on Franz Steineck.
- 31 Helmut Feldvoß on 23 November 1944.
- 32 German Association for the Preservation of War Graves on 13 October 1996.
- 33 See 3.

## Reorganization of the Division Within Germany: September to November 1944

- Divisional Files.
- 2 Recommendation for promotion of Werner Poetschke dated 30 August 1944.
- 3 See 1
- 4 WASt on 22 May 1996 and Alois Brandmaier on 13 September 1944. Piper's presence after 13 October 1944 is attested by his signed recommendation for the Knight's Cross for Armberger.
- 5 Jochen Peiper: unpublished manuscript 1975/76.
- 6 Personal statements of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996 and Dr. Arndt Fischer.
- 7 Dr. Hans Hennecke on 11 February 1996; diary of Hans Kullak (copy in author's possession).
- 8 Werner Wolff in 1944.
- 9 Heinrich Kahlen on 7 June 1990 and Helga Wolff on 30 May 1994.
- 10 Personal statement of Joachim Bidinger on 30 March 1998.

- 11 Personal statement of Albert Habbeney on 11 March 1998.
- 12 Karl-Heinz Vögler on 25 January 1996.
- 13 Karl Wortmann on 29 August 1995.
- 14 Horst Schumann on 20 December 1995.
- 15 See 1.
- 16 Cofirmed by documents.
- 17 Dr. Arndt Fischer.
- 18 Recommendation for award of the German Cross in Gold to Ernst Otto dated 10 November 1944.
- 19 Otto's pay book
- 20 Werner Wolff on 16 November 1944.
- 21 Recommendation of Theo Jensen for inclusion in the German Army's Honor Roll dated 2 November 1944.
- 22 Helmut Jahn on 17 December 1944.
- 23 Jochen Peiper: unpublished manuscript 1975/76.
- 24 Heinz Meier on 17 and 27 March 1995.
- 25 Ibid. and personnel file on Mohnke.
- 26 Gerhard Stiller on 25 March 1998.
- 27 Personal statements of Willi Pluschke and Werner Kindler on 30 May 1995 and 29 April 1996.
- 28 Document.
- 29 Rudi Knobloch on 12 March 1995.
- 30 Evaluation report on Diefenthal dated 1 November 1944.
- 31 Personal statement of Werner Kindler on 29 April 1995.
- 32 Organization position roster for October 1944.
- 33 See 1.
- 34 Peiper on 13 November 1944.
- 35 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 36 See 35.
- 37 Rolf Reiser on 1 November 1995 and 13 December 1996.
- 38 bid

## Preparation for the Ardennes Offensive: 18 November to 15 December 1944

- 1 Günther Borchers on 1 July 1947 and Rolf Reiser 6 June 1998.
- 2 Jochen Peiper: unpublished manuscript 1975/76.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Peiper on 7 September 1945 (Ethint 10).
- 5 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 6 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 7 Report by Hein Springer in the "Kriegsgeschichte der 12. SS-Panzerdivision "Hitlerjugend" by Herbert Meyer.
- 8 See 4 and Dr. Arndt Fischer on 14 June 1998.
- 9 See 5.

#### **Preparations and Objectives for the Ardennes Offensive**

- 1 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 2 Peiper on 7 September (Ethint 1).
- 3 Heinz Birnschein, testimony during Malmedy trial, 1946.
- 4 SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der W-SS Hermann Prieß, testimony during Malmedy trial, 1946. See also 1.
- 5 See 4
- 6 Statements by Werner Sternebeck, Dr. Hans Hennecke, Dr. Arndt Fischer and Erich Maute on 20 May 1948.
- 7 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 3 June 1989.
- 8 Rolf Reiser on 17 February 1991.

#### Ardennes Offensive: 16 December to 24 December 1944

- 1 Heinz Tomhardt, testimony during the Malmedy trial, 1946.
- 2 Peiper on 22 February 1959.

- 3 Personal statements of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 17 November 1995 and Wilhelm Nußhag on 30 May 1996.
- 4 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 20 January 1985.
- 5 See 4
- 6 Peiper on 7 September 1945 (Ethint 10).
- 7 From von Hoffmann to Bechtold; personal statement of Bechtold in October 1995.
- 8 Josef Diefenthal 1946, See 6.
- 9 See 6.
- 10 See 2.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Walter Köbler on 4 October 1947; personal statement of Heinz Hoffmann on 19 November 1995.
- 13 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 14 Recommendation for the Award of the Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross dated 26 December 1944.
- 15 Peiper, testimony in the Malmedy trial, 1946.
- 16 See 14.
- 17 Werner Sternebeck: Report on the Ardennes Offensive. Copy in author's possession.
- 18 Casualty list of SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2.
- 19 Peiper in his recommendation for Award of the Knight's Cross to Georg Preuß dated 28 December 1944.
- 20 Peiper in his recommendation for Naming Karl Übler to the German Army's Roll of Honor dated 28 December 1944.
- 21 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 17 November 1995.
- 22 Dr. Helmut Naumann on 1 February 1995.
- 23 See 17 and 18; 1st Platoon, Company C, 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion.
- 24 See 2.
- 25 See 17.
- 26 Gerhard Franke on 5 December 1947.
- 27 See 2.
- 28 Hans Assenmacher on 5 December 1947.
- 29 See 21.
- 30 Ibid..
- 31 Report of Karl Flacke in "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 32 See 28 and personal statement of Paul Zwigart on 1 June 1996.
- 33 Siegfried Haneberg on 4 February 1947.
- 34 Rudi Rayer on 15 September 1947.
- 35 Willi Braun on 21 November 1951.
- 36 Wolfgang Richter on 5 March 1996.
- 37 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichnungen in den Divisionen des I SS-Panzerkorps," unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 38 Peiper, 1971, commentary in which he mentions a Panzer V.
- 39 MMH, p. 1032, FIM Trial.
- 40 Trial Testimony, Record 2923940.
- 41 "The Devil's Adjutant" by Mike Reynolds.
- 42 Indictment for the Malmedy Trial, 1946.
- 43 Request for Judicial Review, Willis Everett, December 1946.
- 44 See 21.
- 45 Ibid. See 18.
- 46 Rudi Rayer on 24 April 1947 and personal statement of Paul Froehlich on 1 June 1996.
- 47 Walter Lehn on 11 November 1995.
- 48 Rolf Buchheim on 21 January 1996.
- 49 Otto Riess to Jupp Steinbüchel on 23 January 1998.
- 50 Rolf Buchheim in February 1996.
- 51 See 36.

- 52 Rudi Rayer on 26 April 1947.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Dr. Hans Hennecke on 14 March 1996.
- 55 Poetschke in Recommendation for Naming Erich Strelow to the German Army's Roll of Honor dated 28 December 1944.
- 56 Personal statement of Eugen Zimmermann in 1995.
- 57 See 54.
- 58 Dr. Hans Hennecke on 11 February 1996.
- 59 Peiper in Recommendation for Award of the Knight's Cross to Josef Diefenthal dated 26 December 1944.
- 60 Peiper, Testimony in Malmedy trial; Wilhelm Gilbert, sworn deposition dated 10 September 1948; and many others.
- 61 Peiper on 4 April 1967.
- 62 See 55.
- 63 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 64 See 41
- 65 See 6.
- 66 Karl Wortmann: Report concerning his employment in the Ardennes. Copy in author's possession.
- 67 See 15
- 68 Peiper on 21 January 1950.
- 69 See 52.
- 70 After Action Report of the US 199th Infantry Regiment.
- 71 See 13.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 74 See 67 and Gustav Knittel on 15 March 1948.
- 75 See 69 and Heinz Hofmann on 19 November 1995.
- 76 After Action Report: Company K, 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion.
- 77 See 41.
- 78 Heinz Hofmann on 9 November 1995 and personal statement of Walter Ropeter on 3 January 1998.
- 79 Hans Georg Hübler on 6 May 1948.
- 80 Request for Judicial Review by Willis Everett in December 1946, page 1952.
- 81 Personal statement of Walter Ropeter on 10 February 1998.
- 82 Georg Bunda.
- 83 See 69.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 2 November 1995.
- 86 Rolf Reiser on 17 February 1991.
- 87 Hans Gruhle (MS C004).
- 88 Chronicle of the 7./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 "LAH".
- 89 Peiper on 22 February 1959.
- 90 Erich Rumpf on 14 November 1948.
- 91 Peiper in his recommendation for naming Franz Sievers to the German Army's Roll of Honor dated 28 December 1944.
- 92 See 37.
- 93 See 87.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 See 18.
- 96 Rolf Ehrhardt: report concerning his employment in the Ardennes. Copy in author's possession.
- 97 See 13.
- 98 See 18.
- 99 Hal McCown on 6 January 1945.
- 100 Dr. Helmut Naumann on 17 November 1995.
- 102 After Action Report.

#### Panzergruppe Peiper at La Gleize: 21 to 23 December 1944

- 1 Rolf Buchheim in February 1996 and Rolf Reiser on 30 November 1997.
- 2 "The Devil's Adjutant", Mike Reynolds.
- 3 Hans Gruhle (MS C004).
- 4 Hermann Staritz on 30 October 1995.
- 5 Heinz Hofmann in 1946.
- 6 See 3.
- 7 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 8 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 9 Erich Straßgschwandtner on 18 December 1995.
- 10 See 5.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Siegfried Haneberg on 4 February 1997 and casualty list of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 13 Rolf Ehrhardt.
- 14 See 3
- 15 Peiper on 22 February 1959.
- 16 Hal McCown on 6 January 1945.
- 17 See 13.
- 18 See 15.
- 19 See 16.
- 20 See 15.
- 21 See 8.
- 22 Jupp Steinbüchel on 15 November 1997.
- 23 Karl-Heinz Fetzer on 13 July 1997 and personal statement of Werner Kindler.
- 24 Walter Lehn on 4 December 1995.
- 25 See 15.
- 26 Wilhelm Mohnke in his recommendation for Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross dated 26 December 1944.
- 27 Walter Lehn on 24 October 1995.
- 28 See 26
- 29 Peiper in Recommendation for Naming Karl Übler to the German Army's Roll of Honor dated 28 December 1944.
- 30 See 28.
- 31 Fritz Eckmann on 21 December 1995.
- 32 See 16.

#### Breakout from La Gleize: 24 to 25 December 1944

- Walter Lehn on 11 November 1995. Demolitions confirmed by Erich Rumpf and others, including Heinz Hofmann on 30 May 1996.
- 2 Herman Staritz on 30 October 1995.
- 3 Walter Lehn on 11 November 1995.
- 4 Hal McCown on 6 January 1945.
- 5 'The Devil's Adjutant" by Mike Reynolds.
- 6 Benoni Junker on 2 September 1989.
- 7 Herman Staritz on 30 October 1995.
- 8 Walter Lehn on 24 October 1995.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 See 7.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 13 Peiper on 26 December 1946.
- 14 Erich Straßgschwandtner on 18 December 1995.
- 15 Rolf Reiser on 30 November 1995.
- 16 Rolf Buchheim in February 1996.
- 17 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 18 Peiper on 22 February 1959.

- 19 See 12.
- 20 Wilhelm Mohnke in Recommendation for Swords to the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross to Peiper dated 26 December 1944.

# The Panzer Regiment in Action under Poetschke at Bastogne: 28 December 1944 to 12 January 1945

- 1 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 2 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.

#### **Observations**

- 1 Peiper on 22 February 1959
- 2 Casualty list of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 3 "Meine Ehre Heißt Treue" by Oswald Siegmund
- 4 Ewald Claus in the Chronicle of SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 and Kurt Imhoff.
- 5 Dr. Helmut Naumann on 22 February 1996

#### Jochen Peiper Receives the Swords to the Oak Leaves

- Radio message from Hitler at the Führer Headquarters by way of CIC West and the 6. SS-Pz.-Armee.
- 2 Personal statement of Otto Günsche, Hitler's adjutant, on 29 November 1995 and Johannes Göhler, adjutant of SS-Gruppenführer Fegelein in the Führer Headquarters, on 25 May 1998.
- 3 Personal statement of Werner Grothmann, Chief Adjutant of the Waffen-SS for the Reichsführer SS, on 13 May 1998; Appointment Diary for the RFSS.

## Short Rest and Refitting, then Transfer to Hungary: January and February 1945

- 1 Personal statement of Dr. Egon Biller on 10 February 1995 and on 16 May 1997.
- 2 Rolf Reiser on 30 November 1997.
- 3 Erich Straßgschwandtner on 18 December 1995.
- 4 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 5 Rolf Reiser personal statement on 18.2.1996.
- 6 See 4.
- 7 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichnungen in den Divisionen des I SS-Panzerkorps," unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 8 See 7.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 See 5.

# Operation "South Wind" – Smashing the Soviet Bridgehead on the Gran: 17 to 24 February 1945

- 1 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 2 Operations officer of the LSSAH on 12 February 1945.
- 3 Erich Straßgschwandtner on 18 December 1995.
- 4 Heinrich Kahlen on 12 August 1990 and 3 September 1989.
- 5 Rolf Reiser: Descriptions of the fighting in Hungary 1945. Copy in author's possession.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Lehmann/Tiemann.
- 8 See 5.
- 9 Horst Schumann.
- 10 Peiper in After-Action Report for Recommendation for Award of the Oak Leaves to Werner Poetschke dated 26 February 1945.
- 11 Diary of Günther Borcher, SS-Untersturmführer in the 9./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Copy in author's possession.
- 12 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichtungen in den Divisionen des I SS-Panzerkorps," unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 13 See 5.
- 14 See 10.

- 15 Confirmed tank battle days for the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1.
- 16 See 5.
- 17 Werner Wolff: letter to his wife in February 1945, undated.
- 18 Otto Kumm in Recommendation for Award of the Knight's Cross to Bernhard Siebken dated 25 March 1945.
- 19 Kuno Balz on 19 April 1995 and Karl Zarniko on 16 March 1945.
- 20 See 17 and Awards Recommendations Log of the OKH.
- 21 Rolf Reiser on 6 June 1998.
- 22 Rolf Reiser on 30 November 1997 and personal statement on 18 February 1996.
- 23 See 10.

#### Operation "Awakening Spring" – The Lake Balaton Offensive: 6 to 14 March 1945

- 1 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 2 Chronicle of SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 by Kurt Imhoff.
- 3 See 2.
- 4 Otto Kumm in Recommendation for Award of the Knight's Cross to Bernhard Siebken dated 25 March 1945.
- 5 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichtungen in den Divisionen des I SS-Panzerkorps," unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 6 See 2
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 See 1.
- 9 Adam Rensch on 1 April 1996 and Company Chronicle for the 7./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 (Privately published).
- 10 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, and Ralf Tiemann.
- 11 See 10.
- 12 See 1.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Rolf Reiser on 30 November 1997.
- 15 Personal statements of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996 and 30 November 1997.

#### Fighting Withdrawal in Hungary: 18 March to 1 April 1945

- 1 Rolf Reiser: Descriptions of the fighting in Hungary 1945. Copy in author's possession.
- 2 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Tiemann.
- 3 See 1.
- 4 "Die Träger höchster Auszeichtungen in den Divisionen des I SS-Panzerkorps," unpublished manuscript by Patrick Agte.
- 5 Jochen Peiper, from whose letter Sigurd Peiper quoted in writing to Helga Wolff on 7 March 1947.
- 6 Jochen Peiper on 6 January 1958; Daniel Mayer on 11 July 1990; Jakob Aichele on 29 January 1947; Dr. Kurt Sickel on 11 July 1953; and, Götzendorf a.d. Leitha on 11 December 1991.
- 7 Helga Wolff on 30 May 1994.
- 8 Jochen Peiper on 6 January 1958.
- 9 See 2.
- 10 Listing of the tank battle days for the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 by Werner Sternebeck on 16 May 1945.
- 11 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH," by Patrick Agte.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Chronicle of SS-Panzer-Pionier-Bataillon 1 by Kurt Imhoff (privately published).
- 15 Fritz Jäger on 17 May 1998 and personal statement of Eduard Stadler on 23 May 1993.
- 16 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996 and see 4.
- 17 See 1.
- 18 See 16.

- 19 Diary of Günther Borchers, SS-Untersturmführer in the 9./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Copy in author's possession.
- 20 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 21 See 2.
- 22 See 11.
- 23 See 1.
- 24 Confirmed tank battle days 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and Otto Fischer's pay book.
- 25 See 11.
- 26 See 1.
- 27 Daniel Mayer on 20 June 1946.
- 28 Rolf Reiser on 28 February 1996 and personal statement of Heinz Hofmann on 19 November 1996.
- 29 Dr. Rudi Neumayer on 27 October 1952.
- 30 Walter Schüle on 1 March 1998.
- 31 See 24.
- 32 Werner Mager on 17 May 1996.
- 33 See 11.
- 34 See 14.
- 35 "Die 2. SS-Panzerdivision "Das Reich" by Otto Weidinger (Munin Verlag).
- 36 See 24.
- 37 Karl Ledwinke, undated, around 1946.
- 38 See 24.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.

# Fighting Against the Soviets on German and Austrian Territory: 1 April to 8 May 1945

- 1 Johann Wohinsland on 1 March 1998.
- 2 Confirmed tank battle days for the 6./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1; various pay books; and, Sternebeck's list dated 16 May 1945.
- 3 See 2.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 "War Diary of the Cadet Battalion of the Wiener Neustadt Military School. 1945". Copy in author's possession.
- 6 See 2.
- 7 Fritz Langanke in "Die Freiwillige" 7/8 of 1983.
- 8 Rolf Reiser: Descriptions of the fighting in Hungary 1945. Copy in author's possession.
- 9 "Michael Wittmann und die Tiger der LSSAH" by Patrick Agte.
- 10 See 2.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 See 5.
- 13 See 2.
- 14 See 5.
- 15 Walter Robock to Edmund Martin on 24 January 1985.
- 16 "The Leibstandarte," Volume IV/2, by Tiemann.
- 17 Heinz Meier on 14 December 1995.
- 18 Heinz Meier on 29 July 1995.
- 19 See 2.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 See 9.
- 22 Sworn declaration by Dietrich Ziemssen; Werner Kindler's pay book; Recommendation for Award of the Knight's Cross to Georg Preuß dated 28 December; and, Georg Preuß on 9 February 1988.
- 23 Paul Zwigart on 15 April 1996.
- Günther Jensen correspondence of 5 July 1995; Paul Zwigart on 31 March 1996; and, personal statements from several former battalion members.

- 25 Werner Kindler's pay book.
- 26 See 2.
- 27 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 15 January 1998.
- 28 Diary of Günther Borchers. Copy in author's possession.
- 29 See 16.
- 30 See 2.
- 31 Walter Schüle on 1 March 1998.
- 32 Pay book of Kalinowsky.
- 33 See 15.
- 34 See 15.
- 35 See 8.
- 36 See 27.
- 37 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 38 See 37.
- Hans Dorn: manuscript concerning his employment in Austria. Copy in author's possession.
- 40 See 9.
- 41 See 16.
- 42 Walter Lehn on 24 October 1995 and 4 December 1995.
- 43 Walter Lehn on 24 October 1995.
- 44 Personal statement of Rolf Schamp on 20 May 1993.
- 45 Personal statements of Reinhold Kyriss on 20 February 1998 and 19 May 1998.
- 46 Otto Fischer's pay book, Walter Schüle and Rolf Reiser on 15 January 1998.
- 47 Erich Straßgschwandtner on 21 October 1995.
- 48 Personal statement of Werner Kindler on 30 April 1995.
- 49 See 9.
- 50 See 39.
- 51 Personal statement of Paul Froehlich on 18 November 1997.
- 52 Willi Micheluzzi on 21 September 1995.

#### American Captivity: 22 May to 21 August 1945

- 1 Herbert Strong (NA Folder III).
- 2 Personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.

#### The Interrogations

- 1 Jochen Peiper, sworn declaration on 5 November 1948.
- 2 See
- 3 Trial records, US versus Bersin et al, record Group No. 153, US National Archives.
- 4 See 1.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ethint 10.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 See 1.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ethint 10, ML 752.
- 13 See 1.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 American films of the trials at Dachau in the US National Archives.
- 17 See 1.
- 18 See 16.
- 19 See 1.
- 20 Dietrich Schnell, sworn declaration on 10 January 1948 and contents of the subsequent investigative report.

- 21 Assorted personal statements of Hans Siptrott, which were confirmed by others comrades.
- 22 See 1.
- 23 Paul Zwigart: sworn declaration on 25 November 1948.
- 24 Paul Zwigart: sworn declaration on 10 April 1948.
- 25 See 20.
- 26 Request for Judicial Review, Willis Everett, December 1946.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Sworn declarations from the members of the 2. and 9./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and the III./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 from 1946-49, of which numerous examples are in the author's possession.
- 30 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 17 November 1995.
- 31 See 26.

#### The Trial: 16 May to 16 July 1946

- 1 Jochen Peiper on 28 June 1954.
- 2 Geneva Agreement of 1929.
- 3 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 3 June 1989.
- 4 Request for Judicial Review, Willis Everett, December 1946.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 St Louis Dispatch of 20 April 1949 (No. 225).
- 8 Prosecution's argument in US versus Bersin et al. in the US national Archives.
- 9 See 4.
- 10 Trial records, Testimony of Rolf Buchheim 2066, Ernst Otto 2096 ff.
- 11 American films of the trials and personal statement of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 19 February 1996.
- 12 1888 ff and see 4.
- 13 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 17 November 1995.
- 14 See 4.
- 15 American films of the trials at Dachau in the US National Archives
- 16\ See 14.
- 17 Trial Records and see 8.
- 18 Various press reports.
- 19 See 15.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 See 13.
- 22 Hal McCown on 6 January 1945.
- 23 See 15.

#### Prison Years in Landsberg

- 1 "Die Rotjacken von Landsberg" ("The Red Jackets of Landsberg") by Heinrich Pflanz in the Lech Kurier.
- 2 "Nürnberg e.v. Tagebuch" by Gustave M. Gilbert.
- 3 Description in the estate of Erich Rumpf, SS-Obersturmführer of the 9./SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, condemned to death.
- 4 See 1 and "Meine Ehre heißt Treue" by Oswald Siegmund.
- 5 "Die Rotjacken von Landsberg" ("The Red Jackets of Landsberg") by Heinrich Pflanz in the Lech Kurier, No. 44.
- 6 Peiper to his parents on 15 September 1946.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Peiper to his parents on 5 November 1946.
- 9 Peiper to his parents on 26 December 1946.
- 10 See 8.
- 11 Peiper to Burton Ellis on 14 July 1947.
- 12 Ibid.

- 13 Sigurd Peiper to Helga Wolff, wife of SS-Obersturmführer Werner Wolff, on 21 September 1947.
- 14 See 6.
- 15 Woldemar Peiper to Gustav Süßmann on 7 March 1951.
- 16 Die Welt on 30 March 1948.
- 17 Münchner Allgemeine Zeitung, No. 3.
- 18 The text was published in the church paper of the Augsburg Diocese on 20 January 1974.
- 19 Star and Stripes, European edition, 6 May 1949, No. 29, page 7.
- 20 Simpson Report of 19 September 1948 as published in the Chicago Tribune editorial of 13 Oct 1948.
- 21 "Oberst der Waffen-SS und der Malmedyprozeß" by Lothar Greil (Schildverlag, 1980).
- 22 Peiper on 28 June 1954.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 St. Louis Post-Dispatch on 20 April 1949, No. 225.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 See 5.
- 27 Sigurd Peiper on 4 September 1948.
- 28 Detlev Peiper on 1 March 1996.
- 29 "Die Straße" of 4 February 1951, No. 5.
- 30 Peiper's American Landsberg file, folder I, prison folder.
- 31 Peiper on 15 November 1948.
- 32 Peiper on 8 February 1949.
- 33 Sigurd Peiper on 18 December 1950.
- 34 See 22.
- 35 Hans Ulrich on 10 March 1951.
- 36 Peiper to Robert Sell on 7 July 1951.
- 37 Peiper on 23 April 1954.
- 38 See 15.
- 39 Personal statement of Rolf Reiser on 18 February 1996.
- 40 Sigurd Peiper on 5 September 1951.
- 41 Peiper's medical file.
- 42 See 40.
- 43 Press in 1955.
- 44 Peiper on 20 September 1955.
- 45 Peiper on 28 June 1954.
- 46 Peiper estate and various press reports in November/December 1950
- 47 Peiper on 28 December 1953.
- 48 Peiper on 28 June 1954.
- 49 See 41.
- 50 Peiper on 7 September 1955.
- 51 Peiper on 12 February 1955.
- 52 See 50.
- 53 Helmut Meng on 23 July 1956.
- 54 See 44.

#### Peiper's Life After His Release

- 1 New York Times of 22 December 1956 and the Sunday News of 23 December 1956.
- 2 Streng on 15 January 1957.
- 3 Personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 12 June 1998 and personal statement of Wilhelm Schermeng on 28 December 1997.
- 4 Personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 14 May 1998.
- 5 US Embassy, 26 May 1958.
- 6 Jochen Peiper on 31 January 1960.
- 7 Klaus Jelonneck in "Welt der Arbeit," No. 20, of 19 May 1961; "Der Spiegel," No. 24, of 7 June 1961; and, "Vorwärt" of 21 June 1961.

- 8 "Herr Peiper residert bei Porsche" article signed by "G. K." in a newspaper from the German Democratic Republic in June 1959.
- 9 Personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 14 May 1998 and personal statement of Wilhelm Schermeng on 28 December 1997.
- 10 Johannes Gühler on 25 May 1998; personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 12 June 1998; Peiper to Steidle on 8 May 68; and, personal statement of Paul Guhl on 1 July 1995.
- 11 Peiper on 24 December 1973.
- 12 Fritz Kosmehl on 9 January 1996.
- 13 Erhard Gührs on 29 May 1997.
- 14 Personal statement of Otto Dinse on 28 April 1998.
- 15 Stuttgart First Main Criminal Court. Decision of 23 December 1968 (ARs 62/68).
- 16 Peiper to Prof. James Weingartner, undated, around 1969.
- 17 Peiper on 17 November 1971.

#### In France

- 1 Personal statements of Hinrich Peiper on 14 May 1998 and 12 June 1998; Jochen Peiper on 22 June 1976 in a tape-recorded conversation with the French police.
- 2 Personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 14 May 1998; Sales receipt dated 6 August 1965.
- 3 Jochen Peiper on 8 February 1971.
- 4 Peiper on 15 March 1971 to Otto Dinse and personal statement of Otto Dinse on 29 April 1998.
- 5 Personal statement of Erhard Gührs on 1 May 1998.
- 6 Peiper on 28 November 1974.
- 7 Peiper on 7 April 1973.
- 8 Peiper on 8 February 1971.
- 9 See 1.
- 10 Personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 14 May 1998 and Jochen Peiper to Dr. Arndt Fischer on 9 July 1976.
- 11 Personal statements of Hinrich Peiper on 12 June 1998, Erhard Gührs on 1 May 1998 and Otto Dinse on 29 April 1998.
- 12 Jochen Peiper to Otto Dinse on 24 December 1973.
- 13 Jochen Peiper on 18 February 1973.
- 14 Peiper wrote on 29 November 1975: "that I don't basically refuse to participate in meetings, as people have said more than once." Hinrich Peiper confirmed to the author on 12 June 1998 that his father had nothing against meetings of the veterans groups of units which he had formerly commanded. He was just not happy with crowds, the slap-on-the-shoulder mentality and the type of conviviality which went on in the evenings.
- 15 Jochen Peiper on 7 April 1973.
- Statements of various members of the SPW-Bataillon at a meeting of the 14. (scwere gep.)/SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 on 28 April 1998.
- 17 Fritz Kosmehl on 9 January 1996.
- 18 Jochen Peiper 6 August 1973.
- 19 Personal determination by the author at Traves on 21 March 1998.
- 20 Peiper to Dr. Arndt Fischer on 1 December 1974.
- 21 Jochen Peiper on 18 February 1973.
- 22 Jochen Peiper on 6 August 1973.
- 23 Jochen Peiper on 29 November 1974.
- 24 Jochen Peiper on 6 August 1973.
- 25 See 17.
- 26 Jochen Peiper on 29 November 1974.
- 27 Jochen Peiper on 22 November 1974.
- 28 Jochen Peiper to Helmut Jahn on 4 February 1976. He informed his friends of his intentions in several letters.
- 29 Jochen Peiper on 28 November 1974.

- 30 Jochen Peiper to Fritz zu Klampen on 8 May 1960.
- 31 Jochen Peiper on 22 February 1959.
- 32 Jochen Peiper on 29 November 1975.
- 33 See 30.
- 34 Jochen Peiper on 12 December 1975; personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 12 June 1998; and, personal statement of Dr. Arndt Fischer on 19 February 1996.
- 35 Jochen Peiper on 9 April 1976
- 36 "L'Humanité" on 21 June 1976. Article by Pierre Durand. See also Die Zeit of 23 July 1976.
- 37 Communist leaflet addressed to the "inhabitants of Traves" and distributed on 22 June 1976; Peiper to Dr. Arndt Fischer on 9 July 1976
- 38 "Brown Book. War and Nazi Criminals in the BRD", published in East Berlin in 1965, page 91.
- 39 "National-Zeitung der DDR," No. 148, of 23 June 1976, page 4.
- 40 Letter to the editor of Hinrich Peiper in Quick, No. 33 (1976).
- 41 "L'Affaire Peiper" by Roger Martin (1994) and "Les mystères de l'Est" by Lionel Raux (1988).
- 42 Jochen Peiper in a tape-recorded conversation with the French police on 22 June 1976.
- 43 Jochen Peiper to his wife on 22 June 1976; personal statements of Hinrich Peiper on 14 May 1998 and 12 June 1998.
- 44 Jochen Peiper to Rudolf Lehmann on 30 June 1976.
- 45 Die Welt on 23 July 1976.
- 46 Ibid
- 47 Jochen Peiper to Dr. Arndt Fischer on 9 July 1976.
- 48 Stern in July 1976.
- 49 See 44.
- 50 Sec 47
- 51 Various press reports from July 1976 and personal statement of Otto Dinse on 29 April 1998.
- 52 Jochen Peiper on 30 June 1976.
- 53 Die Zeit on 23 July 1976.
- 54 Quick, No. 32, 29 July 1976.
- Various French newspapers from June and July 1976, for example, the Paris Match of 12 July 1976; also, Die Welt of 15 July 1976.
- 56 Jochen Peiper on 30 June 1976.
- 57 See 54.
- 58 Die Welt of 24 July 1976.
- 59 Konstanze Knitter and Günter Stiller in "Bild am Sonntag" on 1 August 1976.
- 60 See 47.
- 61 Jochen Peiper to Rudi Lehmann on 12 July 1976.
- 62 Sigurd Peiper on 1 November 1967 and personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 14 May 1998.
- 63 Erwin Ketelhut in Quick, No. 32, 29 July 1976.
- 64 See 59.
- 65 Investigative Report by the French police, made public in part during the press conference of 7 March 1977; personal statements of Hinrich Peiper of 14 May 1998 and 12 June 1998; and, Le Nouvel Alsacien of 16 July 1976.
- 66 L'Aurore of 17 July 1976.
- 67 Dr. Arndt Fischer on 25 April 1998 and 14 June 1998. Fischer gave the French officials a panorex (a panoramic X-ray) which showed both jawbones complete with teeth, including both articulations, and individual exposures for all teeth. Also, Die Welt on 24 July 1976.
- 68 Quick, No. 32, 29 July 1976.
- 69 Various French newspapers, for example, Le Nouvel Alsacien and Dernière Nouvelles d'Alsace.

- 70 Die Welt of 16 July 1976 and 24 July 1976; Die Zeit of 23 July 1976; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 19 July 1976; Stuttgarter Nachrichten of 19 July 1976; Westfalenblatt of 30 July 1976; and, Hamburger Abendblatt of 22 November 1976.
- 71 Die Welt of 16 July 1976.
- 72 Der Spiegel, No. 30, 19 July 1976.
- 73 Hinrich Peiper in Der Spiegel, No. 34 (1976).
- 74 Die Zeit of 23 July 1976.
- 75 Die Welt of 24 July 1976.
- 76\ Le Nouvel Alsacien of 16 July 1976.
- 77 Die Welt of 19 July 1976.
- 78 Die Welt of 24 July 1976.
- 79 Dernière Nouvelles d'Alsace of 16 July 1976 and 19 January 1979.
- 80 Die Welt of 24 July 1976.
- 81 Hinrich Peiper in Die Welt of 10 January 1977.
- 82 Hinrich Peiper's personal description of the year 1977 in correspondence dated 30 May 1998.
- 83 Proceedings of the German Bundestag, stenographic report, Volume 100, page 768.
- 84 Rheinzeitung of 8 August 1979.
- 85 DM, a newspaper of German Democratic Republic on 4 September 1979.
- 86 Georges Arnaud and Roger Kahane in Antenne on 2 January 1979; "Report" 1976; and, "Malmedy oder das Gericht der Sieger" in the series "Spuren" by Jost van Murr (dated 16 February 1977).
- 87 Sigurd Peiper on 1 November 1978 and personal statement of Hinrich Peiper on 12 June 1998.
- 88 Hinrich Peiper personal statement on 12 June 1998 and various descriptions (1977).
- 89 Hinrich Peiper's personal description of the year 1977 in correspondence dated 30 May 1998 as well as a personal statement on 30 May 1998. Also, Dr. Arndt Fischer on 25 April 1998 and 14 June 1998.
- 90 Personal statement of Detlev Peiper on 10 April 1998.
- 91 Peiper in a conversation with Arndt Fischer in the summer of 1975 and Dr. Arndt Fischer on 17 November 1995.

#### **An Evaluation**

- 1 Jochen Peiper to Paul Hausser on 15 October 1952.
- 2 Hinrich Peiper on 17 June 1979.
- 3 Jochen Peiper on 6 August 1973.
- 4 See 1.

